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Trinitarian Theology beyond Participation

Augustine's *De Trinitate* and Contemporary Theology

MAARTEN WISSE

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Trinitarian Theology beyond Participation

Augustine's *De Trinitate* and Contemporary Theology

by
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To my parents
For teaching me non-participationist Christianity

You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. (Exod. 20.3-4, NIV)

In the Christian religion there are two questions above all others which are difficult. The first concerns the unity of the three persons in the one essence in the Trinity; the other concerns the union of the two natures in the one person in the incarnation. (Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, ed. James T. Dennison, Jr (Phillipsburg, NY: P&R Publishing, 1994), II, 13, vi)

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The journey that led to this book brought me so many friends and conversations that contributed to what this book has become, that it is impossible to mention them all. To those who miss their names, I can only say that I have restricted myself far more than I would have liked to do. I mention here the professors who led the institutes and projects in which I was involved, more or less as representatives for the world of experiences that their institutes have provided: first, Christoph Schwöbel, who taught me how to 'do' Trinitarian theology even when I do it in my own way. Schwöbel really taught me systematic theology, probably not so much by teaching a method, but by exemplifying such a method in person and through guidance, creating an intellectual environment that breathed this approach to systematic theology. What I especially learned from Schwöbel is how to discover an inner 'logic' in Christianity. This logic is not the logic of my analytic philosophical upbringing, but an inner coherence that enables one to understand, or perhaps one should better say, 'follow' the inner rationale of God's action in the

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More than any of my other publications is this book an exploration of my roots. One's roots are one's parents, one might say. My parents have followed my intellectual and spiritual journey with support and sometimes anxiety, fearing that I might go astray from what they see as the only safe way – that of our fathers' faith. I have always been aware of this, and I am grateful for their support and concern, not the least for their ongoing prayer for me, my family and my work. Although I cannot always follow their path, this book testifies to the fact that I will always take the faith of our fathers seriously to the utmost. Therefore, I dedicate this book to my father and mother.

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Maarten Wisse
December 2010

INTRODUCTION

Western Christian Theology in Crisis

Christianity and Christian theology in the West are in crisis; at least this is how many people feel. This crisis is of course a multifaceted phenomenon and it is both caused and influenced by many different factors. A primary factor causing a sense of crisis, however, seems practical. Perhaps more than at any other time in history or anywhere else in the world it is now thought to be natural to have a secular reality in which God, gods or supernatural powers play no role. Until the 1950s, religion could hardly be avoided even by those not intensively practising a religious life. Even after the so-called return of religion in Western society – Islam but also forms of 'free-floating' spirituality – a life without a specific devotion for a specific God from a specific tradition is something that seems obvious to many people. Life can be lived without God; it is a happier life since it requires fewer obligations and it puts less pressure on us, since we don't have to ask ourselves if what we do is good or whether we need penitence or the forgiveness of sins. God has become superfluous and most people do not even care about that.

Given that it is no longer necessary to look at the world and life in general from a religious perspective, the shape and meaning of the world has radically changed. The world is no longer enchanted in terms of an inalienable bond with a God who created it. It is the material product of a natural selection that we manipulate through technical means according to our own sovereign will, through which we generate a maximum of pleasure for so long as we are alive. Of course, since this maximum of pleasure needs to be guaranteed for us all, including our children, we need to take care of our natural environment and natural resources, but this is basically the only limit posed to the maximization of our pleasure. The other one is death, which turns health into a core issue in Western society. But, as we can widely see throughout Western society, we generally care more about the maximization of pleasure, than about the maximization of our health.

Although I might have exaggerated a bit, this is often what practical life is all about in Western society, and it is becoming increasingly so. This is not exclusively so for those who live an entirely 'secular' life. Also those who do not accept the disenchantment of the world fully and who still keep faith in the Christian God and the Christian religious praxis often feel that they themselves are part of this process in many respects. No longer is their religious praxis a commonly accepted indispensable means for survival *in* the world and for the experience *of* the world, but it is continuously a 'free time option' that has the appearance of being superfluous.

It seems to me, this experience of Christians in Western society has at least partly motivated an ongoing systematic-theological interest in rethinking the relationship between God and the world. This interest in overcoming the secularization of our world experience has a long history that has taken many forms. After the secularization of our world experience was largely accepted in the theology of the 1960s and 1970s leading to a transformation of religious engagement into social and political action and a general critique of metaphysical and ontological interests, the 1990s and onwards have shown a new interest in metaphysical ways of thinking our world experience from an explicitly religious perspective.

This new interest is also motivated by a new generation of theologians, although this new generation often builds on the work of an older generation, the generation of those who kept an interest in metaphysics alive during the 1960s to 1980s (e.g. Ratzinger, Pannenberg and Jüngel). Whereas twentieth-century theology was keen to keep in touch with the secular space of society, making theology and Christianity 'relevant' to this society in terms of political and social engagement, a younger generation of confessing Christians intends to develop a more radical Christianity in which the borderline between what is and what is not Christian is more clearly drawn than previously. If we are Christian, we want to know what the distinct contribution of this worldview is over against others, and over against a secular worldview. Ideally we want to know this for every aspect of our ordinary life.

Philosophy has never been absent from these discussions. Perhaps one might even say that it has often taken the lead. The secularization of our world experience has been linked to Heidegger's notion of 'ontotheology'.[1] The experience of the world as a secular space has, so the popular thesis goes, its roots in a postnominalist (and often especially: Protestant) Christianity, in which the world is seen as not-God and therefore 'empty' of meaning.[2] The 'God' opposite to this world is its primary cause, and thus no

[1] Joeri Schrijvers, *Ontotheological Turnings? The Decentering of the Modern Subject in Recent French Phenomenology* (New York: SUNY Press, 2011).

[2] For an extensive analysis of this claim, see Frederiek Depoortere, *The Death of God: An Investigation into the History of the Western Concept of God* (London: T&T Clark, 2008).

more than one object among many others, a being among beings, as Heidegger would call it, a move which reduces God to simply one among many objects, to be technically manipulated at will by the human subject. The critique of ontotheology in Western Christian theology goes back to Hegel's critique of a God opposite to the world as a 'bad infinite'.

The intention to overcome a secularized Christian worldview is broad. It is found both in German Protestant (Jüngel) and Roman Catholic theologies (Ratzinger), but it can also be found in various English-speaking theologies of all confessions (e.g. Radical Orthodoxy, various strands of Evangelical theology, Oliver Davies, Denys Turner, to name but a few). All current strands in systematic theology nowadays seem primarily interested in an attempt to interpret our world in a religious way once again, and to justify this interpretation in terms of a new understanding of the Christian message.

Attempts to do this seem to be dominated by an interest in ontology. The reason for this seems to be that if Christianity can be understood in terms of what is most fundamental to the way the world is, and if this Christian interpretation of the world can be made comprehensible and persuasive over against a secular worldview, then Christianity may again recover some of its previous credibility as a conversation partner for a secular society, including, perhaps, even the secular sciences that dominate the Western university.

A Critique of Trinitarian Theology and an Ontology of Participation

In this book, I will develop a critique of dominant expressions of the response to the secularization of Western society, and I will present an alternative response in the form of an in-depth reading of a classic of the Western theological tradition, Augustine's *De Trinitate*. Two dominant schemes seem to dominate the new interest in ontology: the first is an attempt to rethink theology in terms of the Christian doctrine of the Trinity and, along with it, an interest in developing a consciously relational worldview. The second is an interest in rethinking the relationship between God and the world in terms of an ontology of participation. Both schemes are often closely intertwined. They can even be two sides of the same coin, but they need not be.

Introducing the so-called Trinitarian renaissance seems hardly necessary, because as Colin Gunton remarked in the preface to the second version of *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*: 'Suddenly we are all trinitarians, or so it would seem.'[3] It is precisely for this reason, however, that it also becomes difficult to

[3] Colin E. Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology* (2nd edition; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1997), xv. The most well-known introduction to the renaissance of Trinitarian theology is still Christoph Schwöbel, 'The Renaissance of Trinitarian Theology: Reasons, Problems and Tasks', in Christoph Schwöbel, editor, *Trinitarian Theology Today:*

say precisely what we mean by 'Trinitarian theology', and, therefore, it makes sense to give a fairly precise set of features that I am addressing in this book when speaking about and criticizing certain forms of Trinitarian theology.

The second half of the twentieth century, and especially the last decade, saw a revival of Trinitarian theology, prepared by the work of Karl Barth and Karl Rahner. Kany traces the revival of the modern doctrine of the Trinity back to the year 1927, when Karl Barth put the doctrine of the Trinity at the centre of his *Christlichen Dogmatik im Entwurf*.[4] In the work of both Barth and Rahner, the interest in a revival of the Christian doctrine of the Trinity is motivated by an interest in dynamicizing God. Therefore, a *first* key aspect of the Trinitarian renaissance is what one could call the 'historicization of God'; put with a phrase from Barth, one can say with the title of Jüngel's Barth-study: 'God's being is in becoming';[5] put with Rahner's famous dictum: 'The economic Trinity is the immanent Trinity and the other way round.'[6] This emphasis on the being of God in God's revelation in history implies a critique of the natural theology typical of Western theism.[7]

A *second* main aspect of the Trinitarian renaissance is the more properly Trinitarian aspect. Of course, as a renaissance of the interest in the Christian doctrine of the Trinity, twentieth-century Trinitarian theology meant a rediscovery of that doctrine. However, this was a rediscovery of the doctrine in a specific way. The main thing found wanting in the tradition by Trinitarian theologians was that it did not determine every locus of the dogmatic system. Hence, contemporary Trinitarian theology starts from the conviction that if it is true that the Christian God is Trinity in the true sense of the word, this needs to determine the whole of Christian theology. To use Christoph Schwöbel's term, the doctrine of the Trinity should be conceived of as the *Rahmentheorie* of Christian faith.[8]

Along with the conviction that the doctrine of the Trinity is wholly determinative of everything we want to say theologically, there generally is a

Essays on Divine Being and Act (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995), 1–30; more recent overviews include Gerald O'Collins SJ, 'The Holy Trinity: The State of the Questions', in Stephen Davis, Daniel Kendall and Gerald O'Collins, editors, *The Trinity: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Trinity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 1–25; Gijsbert van den Brink, 'De hedendaagse renaissance van de triniteitsleer: een oriënterend overzicht', *Theologia Reformata* 46 (2003), 210–240.

[4] Roland Kany, *Augustins Trinitätsdenken. Bilanz, Kritik und Weiterführung der modernen Forschung zu "De trinitate"* (Studien und Texte zu Antike und Christentum 22; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007), 369.

[5] Eberhard Jüngel, *Gottes Sein ist im Werden: Verantwortliche Rede vom Sein Gottes bei Karl Barth: Eine Paraphrase* (3rd edition; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1976).

[6] Karl Rahner, *The Trinity* (trans. Joseph Donceel, with introduction, index and glossary by Catherine Mowry LaCugna; New York: Herder & Herder, 1997), 22.

[7] Schwöbel, 'Renaissance of Trinitarian Theology', 7–9.

[8] Christoph Schwöbel, *Gott in Beziehung: Studien zur Dogmatik* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002), 25–51.

high level of *functionalization* of the idea of God as Trinity. If the idea or dogma of God as Trinity is a mere mystery, or a mere equivalent to the name of God, it is hard to draw implications from that dogma to every single locus of systematic theology. Hence, if the doctrine of the Trinity is to become the *Rahmentheorie* for systematic theology, the content of that doctrine needs to be comprehensible and rationally perspicuous. This is precisely the case in contemporary Trinitarian theology. It is characteristic of this type of theology to develop the doctrine of the Trinity in a highly functionalized way. This means that the three divine persons in the Trinity are given meaning in terms of their functions in the works of the Trinity, and this is even more the case when these functions are aligned to the way in which God as Trinity is in itself.

Let me explain this a bit more. The functionalization of the persons in the Trinity has always been present in Christian theology – one only needs to think of the connection between the Father and creation, the Son and justification, and the Spirit and sanctification. However, these 'appropriations' – as they were traditionally called – of creation to the Father, of the Son with justification and of the Spirit with sanctification do not as such make the Trinity more comprehensible. This is all the more so because in the Augustinian tradition of the West these 'appropriations' were seen as merely a matter of emphasis, not of ontological reality. This means that although the work of creation is particularly appropriated to the Father, it was explicitly affirmed that the Son and the Spirit are also active in creation, because 'all works of the Trinity to the outside are works of all three persons indivisibly' (*opera trinitatis ad extra indivisa sunt*). This is different in a functionalized view of the Trinitarian persons, or a functionalized view of the fact that God is Trinity. Functionalization can take two forms. The first is typical of Trinitarian theology in a broad sense, whereas the second is typical of an alignment of Trinitarian theology with a participation ontology. We will discuss the latter below, after we have explained the former in terms of the third and fourth key features of modern Trinitarian theology.

A *third* aspect that is typical of the Trinitarian renaissance is the link between Trinitarianism and relational ontology. We have already seen that the historicization of God was motivated by the critique of Western theism, in which God as a general superbeing opposite to the world was considered as self-sufficient, immutable and independent of the world. Related to the critique of Western theism in Trinitarian theology is the shift from substance-ontological thinking to relational ontology, in which what something is is determined by its relations to something else. In the doctrine of the Trinity proper, this takes the form of the mutual so-called *perichoresis* of the divine persons, that is, the mutual indwelling of the persons in one another. This *perichoresis* is inspired by the Trinitarian theology of the Cappadocian Fathers, who, according to popular scholarship, developed a precursor of

what we now know as a relational ontology (more on this in Chapter 2).[9] Hence, in terms of the functionalization of the Trinity for all theological loci, the combination of a thoroughly Trinitarian theology with a relational ontology means that the idea of God being Trinity can be functionalized so as to claim that God is relation, and that all of God's works are relational as well, given that God is relation in Godself, so that the nature of reality resembles the nature of the Trinity in a fundamental way.

Finally, the historicization of God's being in God's actions, combined with the high level of functionalization of the doctrine of the Trinity as a *Rahmentheorie*, leads to what I call an interest in *mirror structures* between the doctrine of God and other systematic *loci*. In the recent Trinitarian theology, the thoroughly Trinitarian view of every locus takes the form of a mirror structure between the Trinitarian and relational being that God is and a creaturely phenomenon. For example, a primary locus where this happens is theological anthropology.[10] Since God is relational and a communion of love, the essence of what human beings are is that they are relational and directed towards being in communion. The same goes for the recent interest in Trinitarian ecclesiology, where the being of the Church as communion mirrors the being of God as communion.[11]

A similar mirror structure can be found in certain forms of economic theology: given that God is a relational communion of love and equality, our society should also become a society of equals.[12] Finally, the emergence of

[9] A key contribution is Colin E. Gunton, *The One, the Three, and the Many: God, Creation, and the Culture of Modernity; The Bampton Lectures 1992* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), inspired by John D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church* (Contemporary Greek Theologians 4; 2nd edition; Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1993). For an interesting critique of Gunton, see Martin Wendte, 'Legitimiät des Nominalismus? Überlegungen zu Colin Guntons trinitätstheologischer Neuzeitdeutung', in Markus Mühling and Martin Wendte, editors, *Entzogenheit in Gott. Beiträge zur Rede von der Verborgenheit der Trinität* (Ars Disputandi Supplement Series 2; Utrecht: Ars Disputandi, 2005), URL: http://adss.library.uu.nl, 161–186.

[10] Cf., for example, F. LeRon Shults, *Reforming Theological Anthropology: After the Philosophical Turn to Relationality* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), and my critical discussion of Shults: Maarten Wisse, 'Towards a Truly Relational Theology: A Conversation with F. LeRon Shults', *Ars Disputandi* 4 (2004), URL: www.arsdisputandi.org/publish/articles/000160/index.html. Christoph Schwöbel links a relational understanding of God and anthropology in a different way. He links the fact that human beings are relational beings with God's relationship to the world, which then, in turn, is a Trinitarian relationship: Schwöbel, *Gott in Beziehung*, 194–199.

[11] See, for example, Miroslav Volf, *After our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity* (Sacra Doctrina: Christian Theology for a Postmodern Age; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), but also Ratzinger in Roman Catholic theology (see section 2.8).

[12] For examples, see John Milbank, *Being Reconciled: Ontology and Pardon* (Radical Orthodoxy Series; London: Routledge, 2003), 162–186; Kathryn Tanner, *The Economy of Grace* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2005).

Trinitarian theologies of the religions represents a similar mirror structure. Given that God as Trinity is a community in difference, the different religions on earth can also be thought of in terms of strong differences.[13]

So far, the introduction to the renaissance of Trinitarian theology suffices. The key terms of this characterization – historicization, functionalization, relational ontology, and mirror structures – will all play a key role in the critique of contemporary theology presented in this book. The alternative that I develop is based on a rereading and even a return to the tradition that much of contemporary Trinitarian theology so vehemently rejected: Augustine's doctrine of the Trinity. But before we turn to introduce this alternative, I need to say something about the other front that I am in conversation with: an ontology of participation.

In theory, it would be possible to develop a Trinitarian and relational theology in which the world needs to be ordered along the lines of the Trinitarian character of God, without implying that this world has its ontological status *in* God. Thus, a strong distinction between God and the world can be maintained and no monolithic ontology of participation follows.[14] Nevertheless, in practice, modern forms of Trinitarian theology are often closely linked to some form of an ontology of participation. This is easily understandable, since the historicization of God, as the first aspect of modern Trinitarian (as noted above), means that the world and its history should not be seen as something opposed to God's life but, rather, as a part of the description of God's relationship with the world, as a Trinitarian relationship, in which, for example, the history of Jesus Christ as a concrete human being is considered to be a part of the very core of the Trinitarian being of God.

A similar connection between Trinitarian theology and a participation metaphysics can be seen in the role of the Father in modern Trinitarian theology. In this respect, modern Trinitarian theology follows an old tradition that was lost in the West due to the overwhelming influence of Augustine's doctrine of the Trinity. In Augustine, as we will see in Chapter 2, there is a strong emphasis on the full equality of the three persons in the Trinity. The Son and the Spirit are as invisible and as much God as the Father. In the tradition before Augustine, the doctrine of the Trinity remained formulated in line with a metaphysics of participation (we will see an example in section 2.3, in Augustine's conver-

[13] Thus especially Mark Heim, *The Depth of the Riches: A Trinitarian Theology of Religious Ends* (Sacra Doctrina: Christian Theology for a Postmodern Age; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001); for another influential Trinitarian theology of religions, in which mirror structures play hardly any role, see the work of Gavin D'Costa, for example, Gavin D'Costa, *The Meeting of Religions and the Trinity* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000). D'Costa's work, however, tends to develop a pneumatological theology of the religions rather than a modern Trinitarian one.

[14] Markus Mühling's work seems to point in this direction: Markus Mühling, *Gott ist Liebe: Studien zum Verständnis der Liebe als Modell des trinitarischen Redens von Gott* (Marburger theologische Studien 58; 2nd edition; Marburg: Elwert, 2005).

sation with Hilary of Poitiers). The Father is the invisible origin of the Trinity and the source of the divinity of the Son and the Spirit. The Son reveals the invisible and unknowable Father in and as the world, and the Spirit symbolizes the moment of recognition of this revelation of the Father in the Son through the faith of the believers – of course, I am taking a shortcut here, joining many different forms of Trinitarian theology under a common label.

The *first* key aspect of an ontology of participation is a distinct moment of *negative theology* in the Father. This moment of negative theology follows from the identification between God and the philosophical concept of the Absolute. Of course, what is meant by 'the Absolute' in philosophy is itself a matter of intense debate. In the next chapter, we will encounter an influential tradition in Western philosophy which argued that we cannot say what the Absolute is. The Absolute is 'that which has nothing opposite to it', is how one might formulate it. When we say that something 'is', for example, 'it is a horse', then we mean that it is not a dog, or a cat. Therefore, 'is'-language implies 'is not'-language. Such 'is'-language, therefore, cannot be applied to the Absolute, because the Absolute cannot be limited in any sense. Hence it must be beyond any limitation, infinite and, therefore, beyond expression. A theology which pursues an ontology of participation, therefore, will always include a moment of negative theology.

At this point, we can explain what an ontology of participation means: if everything that is is something rather than something else, everything exists in that which has nothing opposite to it, because if not it would be opposite to the Absolute, which cannot be the case by definition. This is the *second* aspect: *everything that is is in the Absolute*, and, as such, everything makes something visible of the Absolute that, as itself, remains invisible. Still, things that exists in the world do not exist in the Absolute as the Absolute itself, because these things are relative and not Absolute. Therefore, they exist *in* the Absolute but they are not the Absolute itself. When we formulate this in terms of a Trinitarian metaphysics, we can say again what we formulated above, although it needs to be stressed that not every functionalized doctrine of the Trinity takes the form of an ontology of participation: the moment of the Father is the moment of the Absolute, the moment of the Son is the moment of the appearance of the Absolute as something that is rather than is not. The moment of the Spirit is the moment of the recognition of this appearance of the Absolute in Being as the Son.

This explanation of ontological participation leads to the third key aspect of an ontology of participation that plays a key role in this book: what I call *pan-mediation*. Pan-mediation is the epistemological flip side of participation and the identification of God with the Absolute. If the relationship between the Absolute and the world is one in which the Absolute is transcendent and the world participates in it, then all cognitive access to the Absolute is through the world, and thus partial and mediated by the world. What this means is that *everything* that is reveals something of the Absolute.

At the same time, *nothing* that is reveals the Absolute in full, or more than anything else. All knowledge is partial and contextual, but still all knowledge of created things tells something about its origin in the Absolute.

It makes sense to recapitulate very briefly what the two trends introduced above provide as an antidote against the disenchantment of the world described above. Against the idea of a world that is devoid of God, a participation ontology in Trinitarian terms describes how the world is in fact part of God's very being, as the world exists *in* God. If this description is then not just a general description of a God over against the world, but of the Trinity itself, that is, the Christian God who became incarnate in Jesus Christ, this turns the re-enchantment of the world into a very specific Christian way of speaking about the world we live in, making clear what sort of difference it makes to believe in God in this way rather than another. Furthermore, the mirror structures mentioned above make the spiritual praxis of the Church into a possible countermovement, in which a relational communitarian way of living is counterposed to the individualist and consumerist way of living that is dominant in Western society.

As mentioned above, although I recognize the sense of crisis in Western Christian theology, I will nevertheless develop a critique of the dominant response to this crisis in terms of a rehabilitation of Augustine's theology. This is a multifaceted critique in which various different areas of Trinitarian theology and participation ontology will be addressed.

The key to my critique, however, is the problem of projection. Pursuing Augustine's critique of negative theology in *De Trinitate* 1.1, my critique will be developed along the following lines, primarily developed in Chapter 1: at first, it seems that a negative theology as characterized above is capable of escaping any suspicion of applying human categories to God, because in these theologies God (more precisely the Father) is *never* equated to our human categories of knowledge and thought. I argue, however, that the reverse is true. Exactly by virtue of the idea of pan-mediation, access to God is always mediated by human categories, and, hence, God never appears 'as such'. Therefore, God will *always* appear in human categories of knowledge and thought.

The problem of projection is even more evident in the case of the various mirror structures developed between the relational Trinitarian being that God is and the relational nature of human beings, the nature of the Church as communion and the Trinitarian theology of the religions. What is presented as a model in which the very being that God is, namely Trinity, is transferred from God to the created realm, is in practice virtually the same as the reverse: ideal forms of human society are transferred and projected upon the way in which God is. This is all the more evident when, as I will show in Chapter 4 in my discussion of Pannenberg, the Trinitarian theologies that are being applied to anthropology, for example, boil down ultimately to general relational anthropologies that could well do without the explicitly Christian Trinitarian frameworks in which they are embedded.

There is a final dimension to my critique of the contemporary Trinitarian theology that I would like to mention here. In Chapter 2, when dealing with the theology of Joseph Ratzinger, I will construe this issue as the problem of the dependence of God on the world. The Hegelian roots of the historicization of God in Trinitarian theology remain at work and cause at least a fundamental ambiguity in the way in which God and the world are dependent upon one another. Ratzinger, for example, claims that God is independent from the world, but he remains fundamentally ambiguous about how this can be guaranteed.

A second dimension to this problem can be seen in soteriology. Soteriologically speaking, the developments described above take the form of one of the biggest hypes in contemporary theology: deification or *theosis*. If our existence is *in* God, then God not only becomes radically dependent on us because we become part of God, but, at least in certain varieties of deification theology, we also become radically dependent on ourselves. Soteriologically, the above-mentioned developments raise fundamental questions concerning the doctrine of grace. It is no coincidence that participationist forms of Trinitarian theology go smoothly with accounts of prayer, healing and liturgy in which human beings play a necessary role in bringing about God's acts. If we are in God, then God's future depends on us, at least in various forms of theology and spirituality. And again, the question at stake is whether in such a case we are not turned into gods of our own making.

In my critique of Trinitarian theology, highlighting the problem of functionalization and mirror structures, and the critique of pan-mediation and participation, it becomes clear that the problem of framing our understanding of God after our own human categories is at the heart of this book. In this sense, the purpose of this book may be seen as a theological application of the first two commandments of the Decalogue – in the Roman Catholic and Lutheran tradition, the first commandment includes what Reformed and Eastern Orthodox believers call the first and the second commandments. In giving the second commandment a strong weight and distinct voice, one may even speak of a distinctly Reformed twist in my argument and in my reading of Augustine. When we conceive of God as the mirror of us human beings, or when we conceive of God as the negation of us human beings, present in participation, the central contention of this book is that the question of idolatry is at stake. Hence, the purpose of the alternative to be developed is to sketch an account of theology, Trinity, Christology, anthropology, epistemology and soteriology in which the trap of thinking about God and the world within one single ontological frame of reference is avoided.

An Alternative

I do not criticize the above-mentioned trends in contemporary theology because I ignore the problem of the disenchantment of the world and the crisis of Western theology. The seeming success of a godless way of living

and of the arbitrariness of faith and Christianity affect me personally as it does many of us, but I do not accept the common solution to these problems. I intend to develop the rudiments of an alternative solution to these problems in terms of a rereading of Augustine's theology as he developed it in his complex and enigmatic work *De Trinitate*.

As mentioned above, it is exactly Augustine's doctrine of the Trinity that has been made responsible for the so-called *Trinitätsvergessenheit* in Western theology, in which God is more a monotheistic general God than the Trinity, more opposite to the world than the one who became incarnate in Christ. This monotheistic God is even partly responsible for the solitariness of the human subject that is so characteristic of modern Western culture and society.

The thesis that I will develop in this book is that Augustine's God as Trinity is indeed a mystery, or, in Augustine's own words, quoting Paul, we see now through a mirror in an enigma. Indeed the consequence of this is that the Trinity cannot, as is the case in contemporary Trinitarian theology and participation metaphysics, be functionalized along the lines of God's relationship to the world and its history. Therefore, the Trinity can only be '*Rahmentheorie des christlichen Glaubens*' in a different way, but still it is.[15]

It is indeed my purpose to show that the incomprehensibility of the Trinity is the underlying rationale for Augustine's development of a Christology, an anthropology, epistemology and soteriology, that does not turn the Trinity into the matrix for our way of being. All of this even happens in *De Trinitate*, especially in the second half of the work. In order to see this, a new heuristic tool for reading the second half is necessary (see section 4.3). In contradistinction to existing scholarship, I will argue that the subject of the second half is not so much the search for structural parallels between God and the mind as it is, rather, the development of a fundamental anthropology, an account of sin and a soteriology.

In this fundamental anthropology, human beings are indeed characterized by their relations but not in the same way as in modern Trinitarian or relational ontologies. In Augustine's theology, the incomprehensibility of the Trinity who God is is constitutive for the relationship between God and human beings because it turns the relationship between God and human beings into a relationship *sui generis*. If human beings love God above all, this love *sui generis* constitutes their relationship to others and to themselves. If the love of God above all is corrupted through sin, this also leads to the corruption of the relationship to creaturely others and to oneself, because it leads to an attempt at self-constitution in the love of oneself, and, in line with this, it leads to the manipulation of the relationship to others.

This is where soteriology comes in. Salvation consists in the restoration of one's relationship to God through faith in Christ, and the restoration of

[15] Cf. Schwöbel, *Gott in Beziehung*, 48–51.

one's relationship both to others and to oneself through the ongoing renewal that is the gift of the Holy Spirit. Thus, salvation does not consist so much in being taken up into a higher unity with God, but it consists in the restoration of one's true humanity as God's creature. This leaves intact a strong distinction between God and humanity, even in the eschaton.

What does this interpretation of Augustine's doctrine of the Trinity and his 'Trinitarian theology' mean for the crisis in which Western theology and Christianity finds itself? It means the acceptance of a gap between God and the world. God is opposite to the world, and, in line with this, I explicitly welcome a certain level of disenchantment of the world. For example, I think that the collapse of a magical experience of the world, as it was still found in Neoplatonism, is an achievement of Christianity. This becomes increasingly important on the level of spirituality in contemporary Western society. In certain strands of evangelical and charismatic theology, the resurgent interest in the magical manipulation of the world in secular circles goes together smoothly with a new appreciation of a Christian theology in which prayer and healing practices, for example, are interpreted in a (technically speaking) magical way.

At the same time, I try to do justice to the objection of ontotheology. Pursuing Augustine's rendering of the incomprehensibility of the Trinity, I develop a response to the objection of ontotheology in terms of the 'distortion' of the relationship between God and the world. Because the Trinity who God is cannot be reconstructed and represented in a human language and thought, the radical 'otherness' of the Trinity is retained. Thus, the incomprehensibility of the Trinity also implies that the relationship between the Trinity and the world becomes incomprehensible. Consequently, the relationship between the Trinity and the world is no longer a parallel to the relationship between the Absolute and the world, as it is defined in Western metaphysics. God as Trinity is only knowable in the concrete history of the Trinity's encounters with the world, in the stories of revelation. From revelation, we get to know the traces that the Trinity leaves in creation, and the creation as the free creative work of the Trinity gives the creation a mysterious aspect. Similarly, every individual part of creation has an irreducible otherness due to its being a free and individual work of the Trinity. In Chapter 5, I develop this point into an analysis of Augustine's contribution to a specifically Christian epistemology.

In this sense, therefore, I propose a re-enchantment of the world, because it is a world that bears the traces of God's creative work. At the same time, it belongs to the core of Christianity to say that this world is ontologically ambiguous. The world bears witness to its creator, but it is not this creator nor part of it, and this world can be experienced and manipulated as if its creator does not exist. In this sense, it belongs to the very ontological nature of the world as creation that it can be disenchanted. Christian faith is not the highest form of ontological rationality, but an 'option'. Although good

reasons can be given for choosing this option, and we will see that Augustine gives such reasons in *De Trinitate*, it still needs to remain an option.

This aspect of Christian faith as an 'option' is theologically very dear to me because it could help us to avoid an attempt to turn the Christian faith into an ideological best explanation of everything. Such a transformation of faith into the highest and necessary form of reason would do away with the freedom of assent that I regard as essential to the Christian concept of faith. Christianity needs to be a message of hope and salvation, rather than an ultimate explanation of everything.

Hence, I accept the disenchantment of the world to a certain extent. I also accept our power to master the world through technical manipulation and culturation, as an ontological possibility that is. A re-enchantment of the world in terms of rethinking being as existence in God is, in my mind, not an effective measure against the grave exploitation of our natural environment nor an adequate answer to our unlimited trust in technical innovation. Rethinking the ontological status of the world in terms of an existence in God is, after all, no more than a reformulation of the *status quo*.

But what then is needed? What is needed is a change of heart rather than a change of ontology. In my reading of Augustine, I will show how for Augustine the promise of Christian faith is located on the level of goodness, not on the level of truth. Doing justice is the ultimate aim of human beings. This doing the good has both a universal and a particularly Christian aspect. As I will show, Augustine suggests that all human beings have an inborn capacity for knowing the good. When it comes to the knowledge and initial desire to do the good, Christianity has no more to offer than a reminder of something that has been built in into human nature, namely, a sensitivity to the good. In many cases, non-believers may even act as reminders of the good to Christians. This reminder is necessary due to sin, but even then it is a reminder that makes an appeal to an inborn capacity.

At the same time, the knowledge of and the basic intention to do the good does not mean that we actually do the good, at least not to a sufficient degree. This is the point where the particularly Christian aspect of a theology of the good comes to the fore. According to Augustine, faith in Christ offers a perspective upon the moral restoration of human beings, so that we are renewed according to the image of God in which we have been created. Hence, the key to a new way of dealing with the world is not a better view of its ontological status but the transformation of our very being into the image of the Trinity. Such a transformation has the promise of restoring our relationships with other human beings, our natural environment, technology and, last but not least, ourselves. If God alone deserves our highest love through faith, this makes us free both to love others without mastering them and to love ourselves without competing with others. For Christians, this is not something that they have already reached, but it is a transformation that they are on the way towards through grace.

In spite of its bad reputation among modern theologians, Augustine's doctrine of grace is of crucial importance at this point. Although an ethics of imitation is important in Christianity, I plea for rooting this spirituality of imitation in a classical doctrine of grace that in turn is rooted in a high Christology. We can only follow Christ in a new life if we are continuously renewed by the Holy Spirit after the image of the Trinity and find our sins forgiven through Christ's blood.

In this sense, Augustine's theology is directed towards doing justice from the beginning to end, without ever becoming a moralistic push towards a perfection rooted in anthropological optimism. We cannot do the good on our own, although we do it through grace and all our earthly happiness consists in doing it. This is paradoxical, but it is crucially important to the credibility of Christianity. An optimistic moralistic Christianity is doomed to fail in the face of frustration about missed opportunities and the stubbornness of human frailty. Augustine's theology retains the focus on the good as the aim of every human being along with the necessity to do the good in order for the Kingdom of God to come, but it remains completely realistic about our capacity to realize the Kingdom of God on our own.

This is where I see the appeal of Christianity in a secular culture. This appeal is not primarily another understanding of reality. Of course the consequence of being in Christ and being constantly renewed by the work of the Spirit will lead to another way of looking at the world around us, but it is not the primary message or appeal to non-Christians. What is primary is the moral transformation of Christians through faith in Christ and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, that is directed towards doing justice. Tertullian's 'See, how much they love one another'[16] should still be the adagium of Christianity's appeal to the world.

How to Read This Book

A final note about the structure of the chapters that follow. As a side-note: those who want a quick outline of the book as a whole, should jump to section 6.1, where I summarize the argument so far. Providing an outline here in the introduction would needlessly duplicate that section.

As the reader will have noticed when reading this introduction, this is a multifaceted book. It has both an historical and a systematic-theological component. As an academic study, it also has a component of discussion with existing research. Although the various aspects of the book are integrated and hopefully make for a coherent flow to my argument, it is possible to read the book according to one specific interest. Section headings show that Chapters 1–4 have a section on secondary literature, often subdivided into subsections

[16] Tertullian, *Apologeticum*, 39.7.

that clearly show where a specific scholar is primarily discussed. Explicit discussion with alternative interpretations in the close reading sections on the various books is limited. Readers with a primary interest in Augustine scholarship could concentrate on the discussions of the secondary literature and the close readings of *De Trinitate*. Conversely, those with a primary interest in systematic theology could skip the close reading sections and concentrate on the 'bridge sections' in which I collect the results from the close readings and bring them to bear on their consequences for systematic theology. Of course systematic theologians will also be interested in the critical studies of representatives of modern theology, often the final sections of chapters.

A Note about Language

During my research over the years, I mostly used the old Post-Nicene Fathers (PNF) translation that is available on the internet, followed by an increasing use of Van Bavel's Dutch translation.[17] The PNF translation is mostly accurate and close to the original, but not very smooth to read. This is where Hill's 1991 translation of *De Trinitate* shines. Hill translates with an eye both to the source language as well as to the target language, carefully weighing the effects of the choice of certain equivalents rather than opting for the most literal parallel between Latin and English. In general, this is a merit of his approach, and it was the main reason for taking all quotations from *De Trinitate* from this translation. Of course, translations are always a matter of debate, and Hill's translation is no exception. This is the reason for dealing with the issue of translation already here, because I have modified Hill's translation at various points to make it fit to my interpretation of Augustine's argument.

Let me mention some of the most important cases where I deviate from Hill's translation. Perhaps the most important one is Hill's use of 'triad' as a translation of the Latin 'trinitas'. I can see why Hill did this. Although *trinity* originally meant simply what we now mean by 'triad', it is now so intimately related to the concept of God that it feels wrong to read it as 'triad'. Therefore, when we translate *trinitas* as *trinity* in English, we no longer feel the ordinary non-theological meaning that the term still had for Augustine's readers. At the same time, it is part of Augustine's argument to create a certain level of fusion between the explicitly theological meaning and the ordinary creaturely meaning of the term. This level of fusion is lost in Hill's translation, because, in spite of his general rule to translate *trinitas* as 'triad', he opts for 'trinity' if the term is all too evidently used for the Trinity who is God. This generates an arbitrariness in the translation of this key term that is unsatisfactory. Therefore, I have changed all occurrences of 'triad' in quotations to 'trinity'. Although I precisely emphasize

[17] Augustinus van Hippo, *Over de Drie-eenheid* (translated from the Latin by T. J. van Bavel; Leuven: Peeters, 2005). Hereafter, I will refer to Van Bavel's comments as 'Van Bavel, *De Trinitate*, page number'.

the idea that Augustine is not searching for a conceptual parallel between the way God is and the way creaturely things are, I think it is a part of the rhetorics of Augustine's argument to constantly play with this possibility.

Another case where I differ from Hill is in his translations of the technical terms *essentia* and *accidentia* in books 5–7. Hill translates *essentia* as 'being'. He is aware of the problem, but he still says it is better than 'essence', although he does not say why.[18] It is probably because for us, 'essence' refers to the 'kernel' of something, that is, that which makes it to what it is, whereas Augustine derives his notion of *essentia* from the verb *esse*, so that he links up essentia with being rather than with substance, which is comprehensible because of his rejection of accidence in God. With some hesitation about the consequences for theology, I can accept this, although it must be said that 'being' as translation of *essentia* is almost as confusing as 'essence'. Philosophically, 'being' is an equivalent for creaturely substance, and it is exactly this that Augustine denies in the case of the Trinity as *essentia*.

Furthermore, Hill translates *accidentia* as 'modification'. I can see why he does this, but I am unhappy with it. This is because modification suggests change in time, whereas *accidentia* does not necessarily denote this. *Accidentia* also indicates the individuality of a member of a class. For example, all horses belong to the class of horses, and the accidents turn them into the specific individual horses, their colour, or their position. The aspect of change through time is only one aspect of the concept of *accidentia*. Of course, this much broader range of connotations are more or less also present in the term 'modification', because 'modification' need not be restricted to changes over time, but still, the pair of philosophical terms 'substance' and 'accident' is so generally accepted in philosophical discourse that I prefer 'accident' as a translation of *accidentia*.

Upon closer examination, I have also reverted Hill's translation of *relative* as 'relationship-wise' to the old PNF translation as 'relatively'. It is true that in English, 'relatively' can have connotations that the Latin *relative* does not at all have in this context. Still, Hill's 'relationship-wise' reminds me too much of an attempt to read contemporary relational thinking back into Augustine, and a close look at the Latin shows that Augustine does not at all introduce an idea of 'relationship' here, but merely a relative way of speaking about the one and the other.[19]

[18] Augustine, *The Trinity* (translated from the Latin by Edmund Hill O.P.; *The Works of Saint Augustine: A New Translation for the 21st Century I/5*; Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1991), 202. Hereafter, I will refer to the translator's comments as 'Hill, page number'.

[19] I have changed more things. Although Hill generally translates very dynamically, he is very literal when it comes to masculine language. For example, I have changed 'sons' in phrases like 'sons of God' into 'children of God' to make them more inclusive.

1

THEOLOGY

1.1. Introduction

This chapter acts like a bridge between the general introduction and the extensive discussions of Augustine's text in subsequent chapters. On the one hand, it addresses Augustine's text through a discussion of the beginning of *De Trinitate*, the proemium to book 1, and especially the first few sentences, but on the other hand, it remains close to the systematic aim of the book through a discussion of these first sentences in view of their significance for contemporary theology. In between Augustine's text and its significance for contemporary theology, the reader will find a discussion of a hot issue in the interpretation of Augustine, namely, Augustine's relationship to the Platonic tradition and the history of Western metaphysics more broadly.

The discussion of Augustine's 'Platonism' and the subsequent discussion of contemporary theological receptions of a 'Christian Platonism' will help us to get a sharper view of the core issues that figure in this book. These issues are, as set out in the general introduction, the relationship between God and the world as a relationship of participation, the concept of God as a mirror structure of the structure of the world, theological alignments of the concept of God to philosophical concepts of the Absolute, and in later chapters, the consequences of these issues for Christology, anthropology and soteriology.

In the next section, I will give a brief overview of how the beginning of *De Trinitate* has been interpreted in modern scholarship. Subsequently, in section 1.3, I will give a close reading of it. In section 1.4, I will make a first step towards a systematic rethinking of the opening sentences in terms of the relationship between Augustine's argument and the history of Western metaphysics, especially Plotinus and Hegel. In section 1.5, I will apply the insights gained in the foregoing discussion for contemporary attempts to think of the Christian God in terms of a Neoplatonic or Hegelian Absolute, paying special attention to the work of Anglo-Saxon theologians Denys Turner and Graham Ward.

1.2. The Opening Sentences in Recent Scholarship

The first sentences of *De Trinitate* really feel like a programmatic and surprisingly, given the rest of the work, polemical statement. Let me first quote them, in order to situate what we will be talking about. The work opens as follows:

> The reader of these reflections of mine on the Trinity should bear in mind that my pen is on the watch against the sophistries of those who scorn the starting-point of faith, and allow themselves to be deceived through an unseasonable and misguided love of reason. Some of them try to transfer what they have observed about bodily things to incorporeal and spiritual things, which they would measure by the standard of what they experience through the senses of the body or learn by natural human intelligence, lively application, and technical skill. There are others who frame what they think about God, if this is what they think, according to the nature and moods of the human spirit, a mistake which ties their arguments about God to distorted and misleading rules of interpretation. Again, there is another type; people who indeed strive to climb above the created universe, so ineluctably subject to change, and raise their regard to the unchanging substance which is God. But so top-heavy are they with the load of their mortality, that what they do not know they wish to give the impression of knowing, and what they wish to know they cannot; and so they block their own road to genuine understanding by asserting too categorically their own presumptuous opinions, and then rather than change a misconceived opinion they have defended, they prefer to leave it uncorrected. (1.1)

It is striking that the programmatic beginning of *De Trinitate* received rather little attention in recent secondary literature. It seems most recent interpreters have difficulty relating the polemical purpose Augustine suggests at the beginning with the rest of the work. Tarsicius van Bavel, for example, in the introduction to the Dutch translation of *De Trinitate*, says that the purpose of the book is not polemical, but rather Augustine's own search for wisdom.[1] The same is true for the most recent translation into English, by Edmund Hill, who remarks:

> It is not really a polemical work, though at times he puts himself into a kind of conventional polemic stance, as though it were a recognized and expected literary form that works on the Trinity should be written

[1] Van Bavel, *De Trinitate*, 10. See also, for example, Alfred Schindler, *Wort und Analogie in Augustins Trinitätslehre* (Hermeneutische Untersuchungen zur Theologie 4; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1965), 1.

> against somebody; nor was it undertaken to meet any particular need or occasion. . . . [T]he *De Trinitate* seems to be, so to say, a gratuitous work, undertaken to express the interest that lay nearest the author's heart.[2]

An interpreter who discusses the opening sentences to some extent is Schindler, who published his monograph on *De Trinitate* in 1965. Schindler discusses the proemium both at the beginning of his book[3] and in his paraphrasing discussion.[4] In his paraphrasing discussion of *De Trinitate*, Schindler formally recognizes the programmatic character of the proemium,[5] but he does not give it a special place in the interpretation of the work.

The twins Barnes and Ayres recognize a certain polemical strand in the work as a whole, but they lay all of the emphasis on Augustine's continuation of the Nicene consensus. In an attempt to do away with a reading that depends too strongly on the links between Augustine and Neoplatonism, they seem to ignore most of the relationship between the two, be they positive appropriations of Neoplatonic themes or criticisms of it.

Barnes and Ayres follow Studer in many respects. Studer pays some attention to the opening sentences of *De Trinitate*, but he incorporates its contents into his own idea of the overall purpose of the work: *exercitatio animi*. According to Studer, the fundamental purpose and scope of the work is that: 'It can be described as an existential inquiry. This is to be understood as a search for the right faith that furthers the Christian life of the searcher himself.'[6] At the same time, Studer is quite right to emphasize that in many cases, Augustine's major works cannot be reduced to a single purpose. In *De Trinitate*, a 'complete symphony sounds'.[7] Still, however, Studer emphasizes the theological aspects of the work much more than its philosophical anti-Neoplatonic aspects. Rather than construing the opening sentences as a dialogue with the Platonic tradition, he puts it in the context of the Arian controversy in Milan.[8] This has to do with Studer's overall purpose of interpreting *De Trinitate*, namely, to show that the key to a proper understanding of the work are the Christological books, especially books 2–4, with their 'doctrine of the divine missions'.[9]

Most recently, Roland Kany refers to the beginning of *De Trinitate* several times in his voluminous work,[10] but he does not pay much attention to it

[2] Hill, 20.
[3] Schindler, *Wort und Analogie*, 1.
[4] Schindler, *Wort und Analogie*, 120–124.
[5] Schindler, *Wort und Analogie*, 121.
[6] Basil Studer, *Augustins De Trinitate. Eine Einführung* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2005), 57, my translation.
[7] Studer, *Augustins De Trinitate*, 57.
[8] Studer, *Augustins De Trinitate*, 63.
[9] I will discuss Studer's Christological reading more extensively in section 3.3.1.
[10] Kany, according to the index: 22, 439, 477, 501.

when he describes the overall purpose and intended readers of the work.[11] At the beginning of his account of the addressees of *De Trinitate*, Kany gives the following description of the purpose of *De Trinitate*:

> What he had begun in the Confessions, he continued in the work on the Trinity: the purpose was, to transform his earlier attempts at an intellectual ascent into the Trinity and his older conceptions of a trinitarian ontology together with a churchly-anti-heretical doctrine of faith and the everything underlying doctrine of grace into a new exercise of the spirit in trinitarian thought.[12]

Like other descriptions of the overall purpose of *De Trinitate*, this one is hard to reconcile with much of what we find in the work. And why do we find hardly any reference to the anti-Pelagian controversy in this work, although the basic tenets are indeed in the background? It seems that Kany's way of formulating the purpose of *De Trinitate* stems from his own preference for the earlier allegedly more philosophically fashionable Augustine from which the mature Augustine of grace then appears as an unhappy deviation. It is no coincidence that Kany's account of *De Trinitate* begins with a sharp attack on the separation of theology and philosophy since Gabriel Biel, a separation that gets a confessional twist when it is followed immediately by the way in which in Melanchthon, the doctrine of the Trinity became devoid of any rational reflection and thus a mere statement of faith.[13] Why did Kany not take the proemium to book 1 more seriously? As I will show in due course, they fit well into the overall argument. However, it might well be that if we take this beginning more seriously, it is not only Gabriel Biel, but indeed Augustine who gives some food to a distinction between the resources for thinking through the Trinity in philosophy and theology.

A possible explanation for the lack of interest in the opening paragraphs is the fact that according to Augustine's own remarks in letter 174 (i.e. the letter that acts as an accompanying letter to the work) the proemia to at least the first four books were lacking in the leaked early version of the work, so that they must have been added when Augustine finally prepared the work for publication in 420–426.[14] However, adding a proemium after having completed the book does not mean that it should be considered as secondary. The present book has been worked on since 2004, and this is the

[11] Kany, *Augustins Trinitätsdenken*, 420–436.

[12] Kany, *Augustins Trinitätsdenken*, 420, my translation.

[13] Kany, *Augustins Trinitätsdenken*, 405–408.

[14] The question of the proemia in *De Trinitate* is a difficult one. The textual traditions concerning the proemia is ambiguous. Augustine does not indicate the first sections of book 1 as a proemium, and we do not know where it ends, although it seems to me quite clear that it ends after section 6. For the discussion concerning the proemia, see Kany, *Augustins Trinitätsdenken*, 20–22.

last chapter that was written, although it appears as the first chapter in this volume. I had, however, already intended to write this chapter in 2005, and there is little reason to ignore it due to its date of origin. One could even reverse the argument in Augustine's case. The fact that Augustine wrote the proemium after having completed the work makes the polemical introduction all the more remarkable, given the fact that he then had a clear overview of the work as a whole. If he had written the proemium at the beginning, one might have suggested that he deviated from his original purpose later on, which is definitely not the case now.

The most recent full-scale interpretation of *De Trinitate* from a philosophical point of view, Brachtendorf's habilitation published in 2000, initially ignores the opening completely, and only turns to it as a paradoxical aspect of the fact that, in Brachtendorf's view, Augustine develops a view of the soul as an analogon to the nature of God as Trinity. Brachtendorf asks how it is possible that the soul becomes an analogon to the ontological nature of God given that Augustine so clearly rejected such a parallel in the opening sentences of his work.[15] Without giving a very clear answer to this question, Brachtendorf closes the discussion of that section with the statement that the move towards simplicity and immutability in the soul, as a result of its ascent from material things to immaterial and immutable things, makes the analogy possible, although Augustine denies that this makes the soul of the same substance as God. The question is, of course, and we will deal with it extensively when we interpret books 8 to 10 in Chapter 4, whether Augustine has the purpose to develop this sort of analogy in mind at all. It is a bit surprising, at least, that given Augustine's clearly programmatic opening, Brachtendorf interprets that opening from an alleged denial of it in book 9, rather than interpreting book 9 on the basis of the programmatic opening.

1.3. Augustine's Programmatic Opening Sentences

The programmatic beginning of *De Trinitate* as we have quoted at the beginning of the previous section is, in a way, paradoxical. On the one hand, Augustine rejects all attempts to think of God along the lines of the material world, the nature and affections of the soul, and along the lines of negative theology, but at the same time, he does all three in *De Trinitate*, and even in this proemium to book 1, as we see in 1.2:

> It was therefore to purify the human spirit of such falsehoods that holy scripture, adapting itself to babes, did not shun any words, proper to

[15] Johannes Brachtendorf, *Die Struktur des menschlichen Geistes nach Augustinus. Selbstreflexion und Erkenntnis Gottes in »De Trinitate«* (Paradeigmata 19; Hamburg: Meiner, 2000), 121–126, especially 122.

> any kind of thing whatever, that might nourish our understanding and enable it to rise up to the sublimities of divine things. Thus it would use words taken from corporeal things to speak about God with, as when it says *Shelter me under the shadow of your wings* (Ps 17:8); and from the sphere of created spirit it has transposed many words to signify what was not in fact like that, but had to be expressed like that; *I am a jealous God* (Ex 20:5) for example, and *I am sorry I made man* (Gn 6:7).

From this quote, it is clear that Augustine deliberately draws on the first two categories that he rejected in the opening sentences. Augustine affirms that Scripture uses words from the created order and more specifically from the human mind to speak of God. This aspect of Scripture is then used as an argument against the third type of error. The refutation of the third error, rejecting both analogies in the material and the spiritual world of the soul, is much sharper:

> But from things that simply do not exist it never has drawn any names to form into figures of speech or weave into riddles. Hence those who are shut off from the truth by the third kind of error fade away into the meaningless even more disastrously than the others, since they imagine things about God that cannot be found either in him or in any creature. (1.2)

This sharp attack on a totally negative way of speaking about God is directly linked to the principal error that Augustine wants to refute. His 'pen is on the watch' against those who refuse to start with faith and have an exaggerated love of reason. This is also what makes the use of analogies from creation in 1.2 different from the refuted analogies of 1.1: Scripture uses all sorts of analogies from the created order, and it even does not use any from things beyond creation, but this is Scripture as revelation, as words of God that come from the outside, presupposing faith and not merely ordinary human reason. This does not mean that Augustine will not be in search of reason in *De Trinitate*. He will do so all the time, but only insofar as reason can serve what has been accepted on the basis of Scripture embedded within the reading community of the Church.

Interestingly, there is a direct parallel to Augustine's programmatic statement in Plotinus, *Enneads* 5.9.1:[16]

[16] It seems this parallel is rather seldom seen in the secondary literature. I found it in Kany, *Augustins Trinitätsdenken,* 439, who links it to Dominic J. O'Meara, 'Epicurus Neoplatonicus', in Therese Fuhrer, Michael Erler and Karin Schlapbach, editors, *Zur Rezeption der hellenistischen Philosophie in der Spätantike* (Philosophie der Antike 9; Stuttgart: Steiner, 1999), 83–92, but O'Meara does not deal with *De Trinitate* himself, so the link between O'Meara and Augustine is Kany's.

> All men from the beginning, as soon as they are born, employ sense-perception before intellect and sense-objects are necessarily the first which they encounter. Some of them stay here and live through their lives considering these to be primary and ultimate, and since they consider what is painful and pleasant in them to be evil and good respectively, they think this is enough, and pass their lives pursuing the one and contriving to get rid of the other. And those of them who claim rationality make this their philosophy, like the heavy sort of birds who have taken much from the earth and are weighed down by it and so are unable to fly high although nature has given them wings. Others have risen a little from the things below because the better part of their soul has urged them on from the pleasant to a greater beauty; but since they were unable to see what is above, as they have no other ground to stand on they are brought down, with the name of virtue, to practical actions and choices of the things below from which they tried to raise themselves at first. But there is a third kind of godlike men who by their greater power and the sharpness of their eyes as if by a special keensightedness see the glory above and are raised to it as if above the clouds and the mist of this lower world and remain there, overlooking all things here below and delighting in the true region which is their own, like a man who has come home after long wandering to his own well-ordered country.[17]

There are various interesting points of comparison. Of course, the most striking difference is that in Plotinus, the third category represents the true philosopher, 'divine–human beings', those who are able to leave everything behind and see the One in a direct vision. Thus, Plotinus creates an exception for the true philosophers including himself, and it is precisely this that Augustine attacks as an act of hubris. Not even the purest philosopher can escape his mortality and bindings to sin, and not even the purest philosopher can remain in the impenetrable light that God is.

Interestingly, this leads to a clear anti-intellectualism in Augustine. Whereas in Plotinus, only the cleverest and least materialist may reach the direct vision of the One, in Augustine, no one can on his own, and God chooses to nourish not only the cleverest, but even the simplest with the anthropomorphic language of faith, to bring them slowly and gradually to the vision of God. What they need for this is not a higher degree of intelligence, but faith in Christ. However, before introducing the person of Christ as the exclusive means to the vision of God, Augustine admits to Plotinus one

[17] Plotinus, *Enneads* 5.9.1. All quotations from Plotinus are from Plotinus, *Enneads* (Greek text and English translation by A. H. Armstrong; Loeb Classical Library; London: Heinemann, 1966–1988).

thing, initially almost joining those favouring Plotinus' way into the One, but then turning Plotinus into an *apologia* for Christianity:

> So then it is difficult to contemplate and have full knowledge of God's substance, which without any change in itself makes things that change, and without any passage of time in itself creates things that exist in time. That is why it is necessary for our minds to be purified before that inexpressible reality can be inexpressibly seen by them; and in order to make us fit and capable of grasping it, we are led along more endurable routes, nurtured on faith as long as we have not yet been endowed with that necessary purification. Thus the apostle indeed says that *all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden in Christ* (Col 2:3); yet to people who though reborn by his grace are still fleshly and 'all too human,' like babes in Christ, he presents him not in the divine strength in which he is equal to the Father, but in the human weakness through which he was crucified. (1.3)

The theme of justice makes for another interesting angle of comparison between Plotinus and Augustine. In Plotinus, we see the theme of justice appear at the end. The philosopher finds on the top of the ascent of reason that which he seems most familiar with and longing for: justice. In Augustine, however, the need for justice stands at the beginning of the journey, because the traveller misses this justice and stands in need of purification before going upwards. This purification is found in Christ, which to find we need faith.

We see in the quote just given how smooth the transition is between Plotinic themes and faith in Jesus Christ in Augustine. The Plotinic themes are played with in all sorts of ways, but with the purpose of moving the reader towards faith in Christ. This, to my conviction, is programmatic and representative of the whole of *De Trinitate*. It provides the bridge between the philosophical and the soteriological aspects of it. Any reading of the philosophical aspects that implies that faith in Christ is superfluous, because there would be a stable resource within human beings – an ontological structure of participation, for example – on which to build salvation, will fail to follow Augustine's argument. But those readings that turn the work into a merely theological and Christological resource, ignoring the 'natural theological' elements in it, will also fail to make sense of the philosophical aspects.

This is also important for the way in which Augustine develops the polemical purpose of the work. He will not or will only occasionally attack his opponents directly, as we will see at the beginning of book 4, discussed in Chapter 3. This is true of the polemics in the direction of non- or almost-Christians – the polemics with the anti-Nicene tradition is another matter. Rather than attacking his opponents directly, Augustine will try to use

resources from their philosophical traditions – eclectically, sometimes more accurately, sometimes only rhetorically meaningful – in order to convince them intellectually of the necessity of faith in Christ for arriving at the vision of God. Hence, in a way, the purpose of the work is polemical, but it is a polemics without a bitter tone, intended to win the reader over to the good side of the battle.

Some tension remains, however, between the apologetic tendency of the work as a whole, and the polemical tone of the proemium. In terms of the composition of the work over time, as I said above, the proemium to book 1 was written at the end of the 20 years it took Augustine to complete the work, even after the main part of the work had been leaked against his will. In the light of this, it is not without significance that the proemium is very defensive, addressing his opponents directly who had possibly already read the work in its leaked version, or speaking to readers who at least knew Augustine's writings on similar topics. The defensive tone begins in the middle of 1.3, right after the passage in which Augustine moved from an affirmation of the difficulty of knowing God, to an admonition of faith in Christ, as quoted above. After that, Augustine continues:

> When some people are told this they get angry and think they are being insulted, and very often they prefer to believe that the ones they hear it from have nothing really to say, rather than consider themselves unable to grasp what they say. And sometimes we give them reasons – not indeed the ones they ask for when they inquire about God, since they are not capable of taking them, nor perhaps are we of mastering or presenting them – but reasons to show them how unfit they are, how little suited to receiving what they demand. (1.3)

We see in this quote that Augustine responds immediately to the incorrigibility of his readers that he attributed earlier to the Platonists. Augustine repeats his point that what his opponents seek cannot be found, and suggests that he will show them their errors.

At the beginning of 1.4, this is followed by a rather precise statement of the scope of the overall argument in positive terms:

> That is why, with the help of the Lord our God, we shall undertake to the best of our ability to give them the reasons they clamor for, and to account for the one and only and true God being a trinity, and for the rightness of saying, believing, understanding that the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit are of one and the same substance or essence. In this way, instead of feeling that they have been fobbed off by my excuses, they may actually come to realize that that supreme goodness does exist which only the most purified minds can gaze upon, and also that they are themselves unable to gaze upon it and grasp it for the

> good reason that the human mind with its weak eyesight cannot concentrate on so overwhelming a light, unless it has been nursed back to full vigor on the *justice of faith* (Rom 4:13). (1.4)

In this quote, one sees an interesting parallel being developed between the Trinity who is the true God, and the highest good discerned by only the most purified minds, the notion of the One that Augustine took from the Platonic tradition. Thus, the way to come to the true vision of God is not a way along the lines of reason and self-confidence, but a way along the lines of recognizing that one is unable to discern that highest good because one lacks a purified mind. This purified mind, then, is only nourished by the righteousness of faith. Again we see the pattern of a play with the way in which the One is said to be reached in Platonism, and the way in which Augustine pushes Christianity as the true way towards it, requiring, however, a decisive moment of humility on the part of the seeker.

Second, it seems that in this formulation of his purpose, Augustine specifically points to books 5–7 of the work. The quotation is followed by the remark: 'But first we must establish by the authority of the holy scriptures whether the faith is in fact like that.' This might well point to books 1–4 at least, whereas it seems that 5–7 deal with the fact 'that the Trinity is the one and only and true God, and also how the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are rightly said, believed, understood, to be of one and the same substance or essence' (1.4).

The end of 1.4, then, addresses the second half of the work, in which an attempt is made to convince semi-pagan readers of the truth and rationality of Christianity in intellectual terms:

> Only then shall we go on, if God so wills and gives his help, to accommodate these talkative reason-mongers who have more conceit than capacity, which makes the disease they suffer from all the more dangerous. We shall do them such a service, perhaps, that they are able to discover reasons they can have no doubt about, and so in cases where they are unable to discover any they will sooner find fault with their own minds than with the truth itself or our arguments. (1.4)

The opponents addressed here are certainly the Platonists, those who are too proud and mistaken in their search for God based on reason. But they are the same that are addressed with what follows immediately:

> In this way if there is a particle of the love or fear of God in them, they may return to the beginning and right order of faith, realizing at least what a wholesome regimen is provided for the faithful in holy Church, whereby the due observance of piety makes the ailing mind well for the perception of unchanging truth, and saves it from being plunged

> into opinions of a noisome falsehood by the random whims of temerity. Nor will I for my part, wherever I stick fast be loath to seek, nor wherever I go wrong be ashamed to learn. (1.4)

It is important to notice that Augustine speaks of the 'return' (*redire*) of his opponents, a return to the Church as the medicine of the faithful, through which they will become capable of perceiving the unchangeable truth (again, a play on the Platonic theme).

The close reading provided so far raises the pressing issue of the readers that Augustine intended the work for. As we have seen, an apologetic move back and forth between Platonism and Christianity is crucial to the overall argument. It goes along with an intention to protect the Nicene tradition against semi-Arian tendencies. As we have seen above, in Augustine's texts, these two directions of the argument go together very closely. That they belong together is also clear from Augustine's use of Scripture throughout *De Trinitate*. Augustine always quotes from Scripture as if those who read him accept its definitive authority. Hence, he accepts as much authority from Scripture as he accepts from reason, and for his argument to make sense to his readers, they must do likewise, which implies that his intended readers, however sceptical they may be about Christianity, have already proceeded at least towards the borderline of the Church, or at least have some allegiance to a certain form of Christianity more broadly conceived.

Almost at the end of *De Trinitate*, Augustine hints once again at who his intended readers are. At the end of section 48 in book 15, in which Augustine quotes from a sermon – Tractate 99 on the Gospel of John – to help those who might find the reasoning on distinctions of time between the Trinitarian persons too difficult, Augustine gives a very interesting hint towards the intended readership of *De Trinitate*, which confirms our impression that he wrote for intellectuals on the borderline of Christianity: 'I have transferred this from that sermon into this book, but I was speaking to believers, not to unbelievers' (15.48). This is telling, because it shows that among the primary readers that Augustine had in mind for *De Trinitate* were indeed *infideles*. At the same time, as we have seen several times, Augustine also still reckons with a readership of believers, since he addresses them several times, also in book 15. Still, he addresses them more as those who already know what he is arguing for, and he admits that he does so at greater length than a readership of believers would justify.[18]

The subtle combination of polemics and apologetics that we find here at the beginning of *De Trinitate* fits well into what we know about the addressees of *De Trinitate* from Augustine's concrete conversations with others in letters, and from his broader intellectual and theological context. Kany

[18] See, for example, 15.39.

summarizes the intended readership of the work well at the end of an overview of those conversations:

> On the one hand, the spiritual environment in which Augustine finds himself is the world of the Christians of North Africa, who saw themselves suddenly confronted with a non-Nicene theology. On the other hand, Augustine carries out his task in the world of questioning and disputing intellectuals of Milan and North Africa towards the end of the fourth and in the first quarter of the fifth century. In this world, various boundaries between paganism and Christianity are still fluid. A sharp distinction between philosophy and theology does not yet exist. In these circles, Augustine attempted to show the plausibility of Christianity. Once more, he wanted to show the superiority of the Christian doctrine of the Trinity over against the theology of pagan thinkers.[19]

It should be noted that my reading of *how* Augustine pleas for the plausibility of Christianity over against pagan philosophy is markedly different from Kany's. In my opinion, Kany Platonizes Augustine too much, but as such, the description of the addressees is adequate. In addition, I have argued that from Augustine's own proemium, we seemingly must conclude that the readership of his work that he has in mind, is not split up into a separate anti-Nicene and a non-Christian intellectual group of readers, but is one and the same set of readers, even if we do not know exactly how this anti-Nicene and semi-pagan interest hang together historically. What we know is how well an 'Arian' construal of the Trinity goes together with a Platonic hierarchical view of the universe, because such a hierarchy implies a strong tendency towards subordinationism, but we do not know exactly who defended such a view, and how they did so.

Coming back to Kany's polemical statements with regard to the relationship between theology and philosophy, and summarizing our findings in this section: of course no sharp distinction between philosophy and theology exists, but still, and that is exactly Augustine's self-declared intention in *De Trinitate*, a move from pagan 'philosophy' to Christian faith requires a crucial step from the philosopher. This step that we find again at the beginning of book 4, where the pride-theme is mentioned again, and also in a work like the *Confessiones*, book 8, where Augustine himself speaks of the humility that a full turn towards Christ requires from an intellectual of his time.

This crucial step is the humility that is required in recognizing that the source of our knowledge of God is not to be found in an independent ascent from our own divine souls into their divine origin. First of all, the soul is not divine, but created, and second, the soul is sinful, and therefore,

[19] Kany, *Augustins Trinitätsdenken*, 436, my translation.

although a memory of its original access to God still remains, the soul is unable to operationalize this memory without God's grace coming from the outside. It should be emphasized that the difference that this implies for the relationship between a pagan philosophical attempt to reach the Absolute, and a Christian search for the vision of God, does not at all coincide with a modern distinction between philosophy and theology, nature and grace, reason and revelation, or whatever anachronistic distinction one may come up with. Nevertheless, it implies some sort of distinction between the route into God in a pagan 'philosophy' and the role of reason in it and the way to God in Christian faith and the role of reason in that.

1.4. Augustine versus the Western Metaphysical Tradition

What can we do with this programmatic beginning? What exactly does Augustine provide as an argument against the Platonic tradition? In order to see that, we should go back to the main criticism that Augustine puts forward in the beginning of book 1:

> Again, there is another type; people who indeed strive to climb above the created universe, so ineluctably subject to change, and raise their regard to the unchanging substance which is God. But so top-heavy are they with the load of their mortality, that what they do not know they wish to give the impression of knowing, and what they wish to know they cannot; and so they block their own road to genuine understanding by asserting too categorically their own presumptuous opinions, and then rather than change a misconceived opinion they have defended, they prefer to leave it uncorrected. (1.1)

The charge is in fact repeated immediately in what follows. Augustine mentions all three categories again and remarks:

> [A]nd those who think of him neither as body nor as created spirit, but still have false ideas about him, ideas which are all the further from the truth in that they have no place either in the world of body, or in that of derived and created spirit, or in the Creator himself. Thus whoever thinks that God is dazzling white, for example, or fiery red, is mistaken, yet these are realities of the bodily world. Or whoever thinks that God forgets things one moment and remembers them the next, or anything like that, is certainly quite wrong, and yet these are realities of the mental world. But those who suppose that God is of such power that he actually begets himself, are if anything even more wrong, since not only is God

> not like that, but neither is anything in the world of body or spirit. There is absolutely no thing whatsoever that brings itself into existence. (1.1)

Augustine hits hardest at the last category, in strong irony, suggesting not only that it is false what the Platonists suggest about God, namely, that God is *causa sui*, but also that it is altogether impossible.

A bit further, after having shown how Scripture uses anthropomorphic language to teach its readers faith in the true God, Augustine again attacks the third category as being the worst of the three, as we have already quoted above:

> But from things that simply do not exist it never has drawn any names to form into figures of speech or weave into riddles. Hence those who are shut off from the truth by the third kind of error fade away into the meaningless even more disastrously than the others, since they imagine things about God that have no place either in him or in anything he has made. (1.2)

From the attacks quoted above, we can deduce various claims. All of these are strongly rhetorically phrased, so that they might not really be intended as arguments in a philosophical debate, but we cannot exclude either, the idea that they also make sense philosophically. First, Augustine suggests the Platonics claim to know something, namely, that God cannot be known by any creaturely means ('that what they do not know they give the impression of knowing', *cum et uideri uolunt scire quod nesciunt*). Then this is immediately given the deathblow in the same sentence: what is unknown, you cannot know, so you cannot even know that you cannot know ('and what they wish to know they cannot', *et quod uolunt scire non possunt*). Hence, claiming that God cannot be known at all is a self-refuting claim because it presupposes some knowledge about God.

As a consequence of this fruitless attempt, the Platonists end up in power play. They boldly put forward their false claims and become incorrigible. The final criticism that Augustine puts forward against them is that of defending that God is *causa sui* (*seipsum gignere* is Augustine's term), and Augustine suggests that being *causa sui* is not only false but that there is no parallel for something like it in the created order, and it seems impossible altogether for something to bring forth itself.

Augustine, so we can plausibly assume, does not write for top-ranking full-time pagan philosophers. We will see in the later discussions of Augustine's conversations with the Platonic tradition that he often plays with Platonic themes but seldomly takes them entirely seriously in what they mean in their own right. His primary purpose is to write for the intellectual upper class of his time and to play with their familiarity with Platonic philosophy in such a way as to convince them of the intellectual superiority of

Christianity, while combining this with an attempt to win them over to the intellectual humility required for a conversion to Christianity.

The charge of intellectual pride, even if it were merely intended as a rhetorical device, is interesting, both philosophically and theologically. What Augustine claims over against totally negative conceptions of God is that they turn God into a projection.[20] Even an attempt to think of God in a totally negative way is a way to suggest that God can be thought without taking recourse in an 'Other' who freely reveals 'himself'. As such, even a totally negative concept of God, which as such is intended to respect the otherness of God as strongly as possible, fills in this concept of God according to the knower's own preference, and thus, remains open to be accused of projecting on God what is in one's own mind. This is a very serious kind of projection, since the believer becomes thereby incorrigible. It seems that the absolutely negative concept of God is necessary in itself, and that it, therefore, cannot be refuted.

Formulated in this way, Augustine's proemium provides an argument against Plotinus' philosophy of the One, since it is precisely in this philosophy that the Absolute is thought in a totally negative way. In addition, however, as I hope to show in the remainder of this chapter, Augustine's argument will prove to be very significant for the relationship between Christian theology and the history of Western metaphysics.

In order to make sense of Augustine's critique of Platonism, we will need to take a closer look at the concept of the One in Neoplatonism. We will do this in terms of a discussion of the German philosopher Jens Halfwassen's work on Neoplatonism, since Halfwassen, following the great German scholar of Neoplatonism Werner Beierwaltes,[21] develops a specific interpretation of Neoplatonism, regarding especially Plotinus, that emphasizes the absolute transcendence of the One.[22] In contrast to many other versions of Platonism,

[20] In the remainder of the chapter, I will leave the other argument against Platonism aside, namely that of the impossibility of something to be *causa sui*. To be honest, I am not so sure that one can make good philosophical or theological sense of this, neither am I convinced by Kany's suggestion that Augustine, in his theology, solved the riddle of the relationship between unity and multiplicity that is implicit in the idea of God as *causa sui* (Kany, *Augustins Trinitätsdenken,* 436–456, 507–521, 531–534). The problem with this suggestion is, first, that Augustine introduces too many problems with the relationship between unity and multiplicity, in books 5–7, for example, to be able to convince any philosopher. Second, Augustine shows himself too little interested in metaphysics as such to suggest that his main purpose is to solve a problem of that kind (surprisingly, after having dealt with these problems so extensively, Kany admits that Augustine is after all not interested in them (Kany, *Augustins Trinitätsdenken,* 532)).

[21] Werner Beierwaltes, *Denken des Einen. Studien zur neuplatonischen Philosophie und ihrer Wirkungsgeschichte* (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1985).

[22] Jens Halfwassen, *Plotin und der Neuplatonismus* (München: Beck, 2004); Jens Halfwassen, *Hegel und der spätantike Neuplatonismus. Untersuchungen zur Metaphysik des Einen und des Nous in Hegels spekulativer und geschichtlicher Deutung* (Hegel-Studien 40; Bonn: Bouvier, 1999).

Middle-Platonism and also later forms of Neoplatonism such as are found in Proclos and Iamblichus, so Halfwassen holds, Plotinian Neoplatonism construes the One as completely transcendent, beyond thought and beyond being. Given that Augustine attacks precisely the idea of the absolute transcendence of the One in the Platonic tradition, Halfwassen's reading of Plotinus gives us an excellent opportunity to test Augustine's critique of Neoplatonism.

However, there is yet another reason to take up Halfwassen's work. Halfwassen's emphasis on the transcendence of the One in Plotinus has its place in the context of an in-depth comparison of Neoplatonism on the one hand, and Hegel's philosophy and use of Neoplatonism on the other.[23] The result of this comparison is a distinction between two models of thinking the Absolute, a Hegelian model in which the Absolute can be thought and is in fact the Spirit that thinks itself, and a Plotinian model, in which the Absolute is beyond thought. The discussion of the Plotinian model is interesting for us in the context of Augustine's critique of it, but the Hegelian model is of equal interest, since a number of present-day systematic-theological views that will figure in this book turn out to be highly indebted to the Hegelian model. For example, this goes for Graham Ward, discussed in this chapter, Joseph Ratzinger, discussed in the next chapter, Wolfhart Pannenberg, discussed in Chapter 4, and last but not least, as I will argue, John Milbank, discussed in Chapters 3 and 4. Thus, taking these two models together, we will be able both to assess Augustine's critique – and confirm it, as I will do below – and to see what this critique implies for the Hegelian model, eventually turning Augustine's critique not only into a critique of Plotinus, but also (and even more strongly) of a contemporary theology that pays tribute to Hegel.

Before we will be in a position to discuss these two models, however, we need some initial insight into the underlying questions that these models attempt to answer in different ways. This will require what we might call a crash course in Western metaphysics. Metaphysics might be phrased as an inquiry into the conditions of possibility of everything that is.[24] Why is there something and what makes up the reality of the things we perceive? According to the Platonic tradition, the reality behind the many things we perceive has its ground in an underlying unity. Neoplatonism, in particular, is clearly a philosophy of the One. We see many trees, but they share an underlying idea of a tree; we see many vegetable beings in the world, which all belong together to a bigger unity of living beings. In the end, we end up with all that

[23] Briefly in Jens Halfwassen, 'Hegels Auseinandersetzung mit dem Absoluten der negativen Theologie', in Anton Friedrich Koch, Alexander Oberauer and Konrad Utz, editors, *Der Begriff als die Wahrheit. Zum Anspruch der Hegelschen 'Subjektiven Logik'* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2003), 31–47, and at book-length in his habilitation: Halfwassen, *Hegel und der spätantike Neuplatonismus*.

[24] Cf., for example, Wolfgang Cramer, *Das Absolute und das Kontingente. Untersuchungen zum Substanzbegriff* (Philosophische Abhandlungen 17; Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1959), 57–67.

is, being itself. Going upwards to higher levels of unity, the dividing principle of matter gradually disappears, and the intellectual and spiritual character of knowledge increases. Thus, a Platonic ascent is a movement from matter to intellect, to understanding, a purification of one's bindings to this world.

Within this process of the ascent towards greater unity, the human soul has a special place because it is precisely the soul and only the soul that has self-consciousness and, thus, that can return from its bindings to matter to its original unity in the One. It is the divine spark that is in matter as a prison, but that retains the memory of its high origin. Thus, the soul has in fact never left the One. It was only through its bindings to matter that it seemed to forget about it, but in itself, it always remained there. Rising up from its residence in multiplicity, it goes up to the unity of being itself, and thinks everything as it is in its full unity of being.

But why go *up* from multiplicity to unity? Is not the unity that the thinking Spirit arrives at, a necessary moment in the unfolding of the absolute Spirit rather than something opposite to it? Basically, this is Hegel's question to the Platonic tradition, especially Plotinus.[25] Hegel values highly the Platonic tradition, especially Neoplatonism, because of its insight in the Spirit as self-consciousness, as the awareness of its original identity with its own thinking of itself, but he criticizes it for positioning the unity of the Spirit as something transcendent to the Spirit rather than seeing the unity of the Spirit as a moment in its own unfolding. According to Hegel, the One and Absolute is not so much the One as detached from the movement into multiplicity, but it is the movement itself, from unity to multiplicity and the self-conscious awareness of that movement, which brings the emerging multiplicity back to its origins in an underlying differentiated unity.

The fact that Hegel borrows the material for his dialectics from the Middle-Platonists rather than from Plotinus is significant, according to Halfwassen, because in Plotinus we find a more radically differentiated view between the One and the world soul (the *nous*) than in the Middle Platonists.[26] Hegel will eventually read the Middle-Platonic view of an Absolute in which a primordial unity is one of the moments in the movement of the Absolute from unity to multiplicity, back to a reflective unity, into Plotinus. Thereby, he overlooks the fact that in Plotinus the One is not a moment in the movement of the Absolute but an Absolute negativity that is beyond everything and absolute transcendence. Halfwassen describes the difference as follows:

> The meaning of the transcendence of the Absolute beyond being as a transcendence beyond the totality in such a sense that the Absolute transcends the totality in every respect, should be brought to the fore

[25] For a more extensive treatment, see Halfwassen, *Hegel und der spätantike Neuplatonismus*, 142–150, 247–320.

[26] Halfwassen, *Hegel und der spätantike Neuplatonismus*, 57.

> especially with regard to Hegel's interpretation of Plotinus. This is because, as we will see, Hegel identifies the Absolute with pure being and as an all-encompassing totality. Opposite to this reinterpretation, from the perspective of Plotinus' thought, one should retain the radically construed absolute transcendence of the One itself and its exposition in a negative theology that is in no sense breached by the use of positive predicates.[27]

In order to understand why Plotinus holds this view, we need to revisit our crash course in Western metaphysics. For Plotinus, being is the appearance of the One in multiplicity. The One itself is entirely beyond multiplicity. The level on which everything in the world is thought together as one unity of being is the world soul (*Nous*). Thus, the place where Hegel finds the closest parallel to his own metaphysics is the level of the world soul. For Plotinus, however, the One can never be thought on this level, because as being thought, the One is still thought within the structures of a level of multiplicity. When the One is thought, it is thought as something opposite to thought and as such, thought within the realm of multiplicity. Therefore, the One cannot be thought at all, and thus must precede thought.

Therefore, Halfwassen asserts that we have two models of Western metaphysics that are both real options: the Hegelian model, borrowing from the Platonic tradition, but primarily from the Middle-Platonic and post-Plotinian Neoplatonic tradition (Proclos), on the one hand, and the Plotinian model, followed in German Idealism by Fichte and Schelling, on the other. The crucial difference between the two models is that in the first the Absolute has the character of totality – Hegel's concept of the whole (*das Ganze*), whereas in the second it does not:

> The Absolute that is thought as absolute Simplicity shows itself especially in the negation of all predicates and the denial of any positive comprehensibility and effability implied in it as the *absolute transcendence* and hence really as the *Absolute*, i.e. as *that which is taken away* from the totality of everything.[28]

The question now is whether Augustine's critique of Neoplatonism still holds for the second Plotinian model. Along the lines of Halfwassen, one could say: given that the One is totally transcendent and can only be spoken of in negative terms, not only the positive affirmations of it are negated but also that this negation is again negated, the otherness of the One is sufficiently warranted. On the other hand, it is precisely this totally negative way of construing the concept of the One that backs up Augustine's critique. Augustine's point

[27] Halfwassen, *Hegel und der spätantike Neuplatonismus*, 267, my translation.
[28] Halfwassen, *Hegel und der spätantike Neuplatonismus*, 266, my translation.

is this: a concept can never be totally negative, because one needs at least to know something to be able to use negative predication.

I see two problems in Halfwassen's construal of the Plotinian model, problems that eventually move the Plotinian model in the direction of the Hegelian model. Without wanting to suggest that a Plotinian metaphysics must collapse entirely into a Hegelian one, I would like to suggest that even in the Plotinian model the One has the character of a totality, be it an infinite totality that surpasses intellectual grasp, but nevertheless it has the character of a totality. And even if this totality is incomprehensible, the decisive point for Augustine's critique of Platonism is that we interpret this incomprehensible and infinite totality in terms of a denial of all that we know. In fact, the concept of the One remains parasitic to the concept of the totality of being, either through its inclusion, or through its denial. Ontologically, the One encompasses the totality of being, and epistemologically, it is thought of as the opposite of this totality. The interplay of these two makes up the specific form of Plotinus' metaphysics.

The first problem is one of interpretation. Halfwassen, and Beierwaltes before him, strongly emphasize the otherness of the One, the fact that it is beyond being, beyond thought, absolute transcendence, and so on. The key *Enneads* they use for this emphasis are *Enneads* 5 and 6. Still, they seem to underestimate those passages where Plotinus indeed uses language for the One that construes it as a totality, as, for example, in this quote:

> How then does multiplicity come from one? Because it is everywhere, for there is nowhere where it is not. Therefore it fills all things; so it is many, or rather it is already all. Now if it itself were only everywhere, it would itself be all things; but since it is also nowhere, all things come into being through him, because he is everywhere, but are other than him, because he is nowhere. Why then, is he not only everywhere, and is also, besides being everywhere, nowhere? Because there must be one before all things. Therefore he must fill all things and make all things, not be all the things he makes.[29]

Halfwassen discusses a similar passage in *Enneads* 5.2.1, where it is stated:

> The One is all things and not a single one of them: it is the principle of all things, not all things, but all things have that other kind of transcendent existence; for in a way they do occur in the One; or rather they are not there yet, but they will be. How then do all things come from the One, which is simple and has in it no diverse variety, or any sort of doubleness? It is because there is nothing in it that all things come from it: in order that being may exist, the One is not being, but

[29] Plotinus, *Enneads* 3.9.4.

> the generator of being. This, we may say, is the first act of generation: the one, perfect because it seeks nothing, has nothing, and needs nothing, overflows, as it were, and its superabundance makes something other than itself. This, when it has come into being, turns back upon the One and is filled, and becomes Intellect by looking towards it.[30]

It is clear that this quotation deals with the One. Halfwassen interprets it only as pointing to the One as the source and ground of all that is. And indeed here, as well as in the previous passage, Plotinus stresses the transcendence of the One over thought and knowledge, stating that the One is nothing rather than something. However, it is not without significance that the quote opens with the *paradoxical* statement that the One is *both* everything and nothing, rather than, as Halfwassen likes to stress so much, only absolutely transcendent.

To my opinion, it is certainly no slip of the pen when Plotinus affirms of the One both that it is everything and nothing. Instead, he has a good reason for this that follows from his own system. This moves us immediately to the second problem, namely, a systematic one. If the One were really 'ontologically' transcendent to the world, then the very reason for its being beyond being and thought would be denied. The reason for the One being beyond thought and being is that the One cannot have anything opposite to it. Therefore, it cannot be the negation of the world soul because, in that way, it is still thought of as something over against something else, and therefore not a true Absolute One. But, for the very same reason, the One cannot be ontologically transcendent. Therefore, if the One is truly Absolute, it must include everything and thus be both nothing and everything at the same time. It must be nothing as well, because the One does not encompass the world or the knower in a way that the knower and the known or the One and the world can still be distinguished, so that epistemologically, the One transcends our epistemic access, but this is so precisely because, ontologically, there is no distinction whatsoever between the One and anything else. Otherwise the One would not be the Absolute, and this implies that even the Plotinian One needs to be a kind of totality.

This distinction between an epistemological transcendence and an ontological totality does not stand in contradiction with Plotinus' repeated denial of the 'being' of the One. Of course it cannot be said of the One that it 'is', because the predicate of being is made in thought, and thus, it cannot be properly predicated of the One, which is beyond thought. Still, this is the reason why Plotinus ends up in paradoxical statements such as that the One is everything and nothing at the same time. Nothing can be opposite to the One, and, therefore, everything that is must be in it, although the way in which it is in it is inexpressible and unthinkable, because it is absolutely simple and, therefore, without any distinction. As we will see below, this is exactly the point that we will encounter in the mystical theology of Denys

[30] Plotinus, *Enneads* 5.2.1; Halfwassen, *Hegel und der spätantike Neuplatonismus*, 322.

Turner, who explicitly denies the possibility of distinguishing between God who is beyond thought, and the world as it appears to us.

The same point can be made in terms of the central category of ascent in Plotinus' philosophy. This ascent is an ascent from higher levels of materiality and multiplicity to lower levels of these, and from lower levels of unity and intellect to higher levels. The soul moves from its bindings to matter, discovering its original unity in the world soul, and in the world soul one moves up in a leap beyond itself and thought towards its original unity in the One. The 'motor' behind this ascent, or more properly metaphysically phrased its condition of possibility, is the relationship between the One and a negative principle ultimately flowing from it, that is, matter. Matter is not a principle of its own, unless Plotinus would turn into Gnosticism, but merely, so to speak, the mode of appearance of the One in multiplicity. Therefore, insofar as there is something rather than nothing, although this something is the One in its interplay with matter, everything that is flows from it and participates in it. Although our epistemic access to the One is finally forced to leap from thought to vision, the very mode of its operation towards this leap, the ascent from multiplicity to unity, is enabled by the knower's ontological participation in the One. Otherwise there would be no trace of the One that enabled the knower to proceed towards it.

The systematic upshot of this is what may count as a hopefully more sophisticated version of Augustine's argument. The concept of the One is parasitic to 'everything', since the way we know it is through a stepwise negation of everything in the world. On top, there is something supposedly other than everything we know, but given that this concept has no material content of its own it remains an extrapolation of the move made in thought. This brings us quite close to Hegel's Absolute, which is the movement of the whole from primordial simplicity to otherness, encompassed in a differentiated totality of the Absolute Spirit.

And this, Augustine then suggests, is a product of the human mind. It is a projection in which no real otherness from the outside plays a role. It is a construct of pride. If God is thought along the lines of such constructs of pride, God becomes a God of our own making.

As a bridge towards making this argument fruitful for contemporary theology, it is worthwhile to look once again at Halfwassen's work because the connection of metaphysics and theology is not coincidental, rather it is firmly rooted in the history of metaphysics. Halfwassen traces Hegel's development of his dialectics as a threefold moment in the movement of the Absolute out of itself into the other and of its return to its unity as a differentiated unity. He traces it back to Hegel's reading of the Middle-Platonic tradition, but mediated through a theological source, Eusebius of Ceasarea's *Praeparatio evangelica*.[31] In this work, Eusebius defends the Christian doctrine of the

[31] Halfwassen, *Hegel und der spätantike Neuplatonismus*, 39–44, 57–78.

Trinity through an appropriation of the Platonic tradition. Borrowing from Plato, but especially from the Middle-Platonists, Eusebius argues that the Christian confession of Father and Son – the Spirit receives much less attention in Eusebius because he does not fit into the Platonic scheme – runs parallel to the Platonic notion of the One who is beyond multiplicity and of the Son who is the principle of the One's appearance in multiplicity.

The exact course of this development need not concern us too much here. What is of particular interest are the consequences of modelling the Christian doctrine of the Trinity and Christology after the three moments of a Platonic metaphysics. As we will see, the scheme of a participatory structure that includes a primary moment of incomprehensibility, a mediating moment that is the outflow of the incomprehensible into the world, and finally a reintegrating moment that recognizes the ultimate identity of the second with the first, is a scheme that underlies certain types of contemporary theology.

Interestingly, Halfwassen's analysis, without touching in any sense on contemporary theology, clearly points to the Christological consequences of modelling the Trinity after a metaphysical Absolute:

> To Hegel, this incarnation of the Logos, however, is not the exclusive privilege of the single God-man, but following the mystical Christology of Eckhart, the universal essence of human beings, by virtue of which this Spirit has its being and can be 'enlightened' by God as the universal and absolute Spirit.[32]

This quotation is taken from Halfwassen's description of the early stages of Hegel's thought, when his dialectics of the absolute Spirit has not yet matured. In his later thought, Hegel has much more room for a Christology in which the particularity of the concrete man Jesus plays a crucial role. In fact, Hegel argues in his mature thought that the ultimate unity of the first moment of original indifferentiated unity with the second moment of its concretization in the world can only be true if the most general, the moment of God the Father, shows itself to be truly identical with the uttermost concrete, the concreteness of a single individual:

> For Hegel then, the dogma of the incarnation expresses this unity of the absolute, divine and subjective human Spirit, which makes up the worldliness and objectivity of the Spirit. This unity becomes individual in Christ, at a specific time and a specific place, and thus historically real. According to Hegel, namely, the Idea must go in its self-concretization until the immediate singularity of a concrete human individual. Hegel emphasizes against Neoplatonism: 'But it is not sufficient, that

[32] Halfwassen, *Hegel und der spätantike Neuplatonismus*, 78, my translation.

> it is only known in the relationship with human beings, that Christ is a real human being. This is the relationship with human beings, as this [human being]. This "this" is the extreme moment in Christianity. It is the linking up of the most extreme opposites.' The unity of the Idea splits itself up into the otherworldly Idea itself and its most extreme opposite, the radical finitude of the Spirit in a single mortal human being, and even within this most extreme duplication, it remains an absolute, and infinite unity, a unity that encompasses and elevates the poles of the opposition. The concrete universality of the Absolute reaches its destiny only in that it proceeds until it reaches the immediate singularity of a real individual self, while still remaining in itself.[33]

Still, this does not do away with the fact that the concreteness of the man Christ is ultimately only the affirmation of the more general fact of the divine status of all human beings because of their participation in the absolute Spirit, as Halfwassen explicitly recognizes:

> Thus, on the one hand, with the dogma of the Church, Hegel interprets the incarnation of God as realized in the individuality of a historical singular God-man. At the same time, however, beyond the dogma of the Church, he interprets it as the realization and self-comprehension of the divine Spirit in all human self-consciousness, which realizes itself in the concrete self-consciousness of concrete human beings, but at the same time transcends the individuality of the God-man in making up the unity of God and humanity in human nature as such, insofar as the nature of humanity is this Spirit. The absolute Spirit is present in the concrete human spirit, both subjectively in the single human self-consciousness, and also intersubjectively in the consciousness of the community, which comes to explicit self-consciousness in the philosophical understanding of the Idea of Christianity.[34]

What Halfwassen's analysis of Hegel's Christology makes clear is that a Christology or more broadly a Christian Trinitarian theology along the lines of a metaphysical Absolute ends up in a universalization of the uniqueness of the incarnation in the one person Jesus Christ as the emergence of everything that is from a transcendent origin.[35] At best, the uniqueness of the person of Christ can be made sense of as an illustration or an affirmation of a more basic ontological structure. This also has important ramifications for

[33] Halfwassen, *Hegel und der spätantike Neuplatonismus*, 139–140, my translation.
[34] Halfwassen, *Hegel und der spätantike Neuplatonismus*, 141, my translation.
[35] Cf. also Martin Wendte, *Gottmenschliche Einheit bei Hegel. Eine logische und theologische Untersuchung* (Quellen und Studien zur Philosophie 77; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2007), 7.

what we have called the pan-mediation thesis in the Introduction. If Christ is the mere affirmation of the general mediating structure between an unknowable supreme God – the moment of the Father – and the world as we have it (the more Platonic, not so much the Hegelian variety of the story), Christ reveals this structure no more than anything else, and a drastic form of subordinationism follows. The more Hegelian one's ontology is the easier it is to avoid this subordinationism because Hegel stresses the ultimate identity of the primary moment of indeterminacy and the second moment of its self-alienation. The price paid, however, will be an Absolute bereft of all its incomprehensibility, that falls into human hands all the more severely than in the Platonic variant.[36]

1.5. Today's Targets of an Augustinian Critique

A God along the lines of a Platonic or Hegelian Absolute is no uncommon phenomenon in present-day theology,[37] although certainly not all theologians will recognize their debt to the Platonic or Hegelian tradition. It is the purpose of this section to show the relevance of the discussion about Plotinus and Hegel for influential contemporary theologies. I will take Denys Turner and Graham Ward as examples of what I see as Platonizing and Hegelianizing tendencies in contemporary theology.

Before I discuss Turner and Ward, it will be good to briefly recount the central claims that make up the specific pattern in the concept of God that opens these theologians up to a contemporary version of Augustine's critique of Neoplatonism. The first aspect of this pattern is a moment in the concept of God which is completely unknowable. Theologically speaking, this is usually seen as the moment of the Father. The second aspect is a moment of mediation, in which it is claimed that everything that is provides partial access to the unknowable God; however, at the same time, no specific form of access can claim to have a privilege over any other. We have called this second moment a claim of pan-mediation. Theologically speaking, it is the moment of the Son, but with Halfwassen's crucial reminder that it cannot be a Christology in which a concrete person takes centre stage – this would even be against the pan-mediation thesis – but it needs to be an incarnational structure in which everything mediates in the same way. Finally, the third moment is the moment in which the initial negative moment and the second mediating moment are taken up into an overarching totality. This totality is the recognition of the ultimate unity and identity of the first and the second moment. Theologically speaking, this is the moment of the Spirit.

[36] Cf. Wendte, *Gottmenschliche Einheit bei Hegel*, 317–320.
[37] For other examples, see Wendte, *Gottmenschliche Einheit bei Hegel*, 327–341.

1.5.1. Denys Turner

A good example that illustrates how Augustine's argument at the beginning of *De Trinitate* might be made fruitful for contemporary theology is a dialogue with Denys Turner's mystical theology. In his 1995 book *The Darkness of God: Negativity in Christian Mysticism*, Turner attempts to recover the understanding of mysticism that, according to him, characterized the Early Church and the Middle Ages, namely, a Christian mysticism in which not the concept of mystical experience but rather the rejection of experience plays a key role in mysticism. Turner formulates the difference between a modern mystical 'experience' and the classical premodern mystical tradition like this:

> Put very bluntly, the difference seemed to be this: that whereas our employment of the metaphors of 'inwardness' and 'ascent' appears to be tied in with the achievement and the cultivation of a certain kind of experience – such as those recommended within the practice of what is called, nowadays, 'centring' or 'contemplative' prayer – the mediaeval employment of them was tied in with a 'critique' of such religious experiences and practices. Whereas we appear to have 'psychologized' the metaphors, the Neoplatonic mediaeval writer used the metaphors in an 'apophatic' spirit to play down the value of the 'experiential'; and that, therefore, whereas it would come naturally to the contemporary, 'psychologising' mind to think of 'the mystical' in terms of its characterizing *experiences*, the mediaeval mind thought of the 'mystical', that is to say, the 'hidden' or 'secret', wisdom as being what the Author of *The Cloud of Unknowing* called a 'divinity' which is 'hidden' precisely *from* experience.[38]

Mysticism is something that is not so much related to 'something special', but it is an aspect of an overarching Christian worldview and especially, of the Christian concept of God. This concept of God is characterized by a strong critique of what Turner sees as a typically modern separation of God and the self, and of God and the world:

> For in these [classically mystical, MW] authors may be found what I have called an 'apophatic anthropology' as radical as their apophatic theology, the one intimately connected with the other. All three in *some* sense deny that I am 'a self'; or at least, they appear to say that whatever may be the proper description of the fullest union of the human self with God, there is no distinction which we are able to make *between* that 'self' and the God it is one with.[39]

[38] Denys Turner, *The Darkness of God: Negativity in Christian Mysticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 4.
[39] Turner, *The Darkness of God*, 6.

The point of entrance to Turner's recovery of the mystical tradition is an analysis of the apophatic and cataphatic in Dionysius the Areopagite. In two later chapters, Turner deals extensively with Augustine notion of interiority as well, but it seems the fundamental frame of reference for Turner's analysis is still Dionysius rather than Augustine.[40] I will focus here on his analysis of Dionysius, as this is where the problem that is central to this chapter comes most clearly to the fore.

Turner starts from a definition of the apophatic:

> 'Apophaticism' is the name of that theology which is done against the background of human ignorance of the nature of God. . . . It is the conception of theology not as a naive *pre*-critical ignorance of God, but as a kind of acquired ignorance, . . . It is the conception of theology as a strategy and practice of unknowing, as the fourteenth-century English mystic called it, who, we might say, invented the transitive verb-form 'to unknow' in order to describe theological knowledge, in this its deconstructive mode.[41]

What strikes me here is the emphasis on the 'strategy and practice of unknowing'. In a way, this already confirms Augustine's argument against this type of negative theology: negative theology in an encompassing sense is not something that overcomes the believer as a result of divine revelation, but rather the other way around: negative theology is a *strategy* of unknowing on the part of the believer. It is not because of an encounter with God that brings me to wonder and awe, but it is in the face of my mastering of the world that I begin to move towards the 'Other' through a strategy of denial. I am exaggerating a bit here on the basis of this single quotation, but we will see how Turner's further argument confirms this thesis.

What we had so far is an emphasis on the unknowing as a strategy. Although it is characterized by a strategic strand, it at least follows its intention to reach that which cannot be named, striving after an emphasis on negativity, on not knowing. This emphasis is not lost when Turner moves to the cataphatic. Quite the contrary:

> What, then, of the 'cataphatic'? The cataphatic is, we might say, the verbose element in theology, it is the Christian mind deploying all the resources of language in the effort to express something about God, and in that straining to speak, theology uses as many voices as it can. It is the cataphatic in theology which causes its metaphor-ridden character, causes it to borrow vocabularies by analogy from many another

[40] Turner is, like various other authors, aware of pushing Augustine a bit too far in the direction of a participatory metaphysics: Turner, *The Darkness of God*, 74–75.

[41] Turner, *The Darkness of God*, 19.

> discourse, whether of science, literature, art, sex, politics, the law, the economy, family life, warfare, play, teaching, physiology, or whatever. It is its cataphatic tendencies which account for the sheer *heaviness* of theological language, its character of being linguistically *overburdened*; it is the cataphatic which accounts for that fine *nimietas* of image which we may observe in the best theologies, for example of Julian of Norwich or Bernard of Clairvaux. For in its cataphatic mode, theology is, we might say, a kind of verbal riot, an anarchy of discourse in which anything goes. And when we have said that much, narrowly, about the formal language of theology, we have only begun: for that is to say nothing about the extensive *non*-verbal vocabulary of theology, its liturgical and sacramental action, its music, its architecture, its dance and gesture, all of which are intrinsic to its character as an *expressive* discourse, a discourse of theological articulation.[42]

Let me draw attention to the fact that in spite of the cataphatic character of the discourse, it is marked by being 'overburdened', 'heaviness', 'anarchy of discourse', rather than clarity of discourse and argumentative precision. Further on in the chapter, Turner stresses the parallel between the negativity of both apophatic and cataphatic language explicitly:

> It is of the greatest consequence to see that negative language about God is no more apophatic in itself than is affirmative language. The apophatic is the linguistic strategy of somehow showing by means of language that which lies beyond language. It is not done, and it cannot be done, by means of negative utterances alone which are no less bits of ordinarily intelligible human discourse than are affirmations.[43]

What we see, and what is crucial to Augustine's critique of the Neoplatonic negative theology, is the typical 'overflow' from nothing to everything. The character of the nothing implies the everything. If the strategy to reach out to the Divine is a strategy beyond everything, than anything that is said, somehow points to it as well. The dialectical relationship between the negative and the positive language about God keeps the two from becoming specific as to what and what not can be said about God.

Of course, as an immediate consequence, this means that no language can be privileged over another:

> Theological adequacy therefore requires the maximization of our discourses about God – and, whatever constraints an apophatic theology may impose, they cannot justify the restriction of theological language

[42] Turner, *The Darkness of God*, 20.
[43] Turner, *The Darkness of God*, 34–35.

> to just a few, favoured, respectful, 'pious', names. . . . In a pious vocabulary of unshocking, 'appropriate' names, lies the danger of the theologian's being all the more tempted to suppose that our language about God has succeeded in capturing the divine reality in some ultimately adequate way.[44]

This reminds us of Halfwassen's remark about Christology in Hegel and of the pan-mediation thesis that is implied in it. If being as it appears from the One, which is itself beyond thought, is the expression of the One in multiplicity, then nothing in multiplicity can be an expression of the One more than anything else. Therefore, in any type of theology following this logic, Christ can be no more than the paradigmatic expression of this fact, but it cannot be an expression of the One more specifically than anything else. Christology becomes a repetition of ontology, as we will see in subsequent chapters, in Ratzinger – surprisingly – Pannenberg and Radical Orthodoxy. Trinitarian theology along these types of theology is a personal redescription of the way things are: the ontological flow from the One into the world and back.

However, one step still failed: the ontological engulfing of everything within one undifferentiated whole. There is in principle no compelling reason why the apophatic implies the cataphatic. If there were no ontological participatory structure that included everything that is, into the One, so that the One would be really ontologically other than the creation, absolutely transcendent as Halfwassen prefers to call it, then the apophatic would not lead to the cataphatic nor the other way around. Denying the world would help us stress the otherness of the One, but it would not tell us anything about it. For our access – the term 'knowledge' would be inappropriate – to the One, we would be entirely dependent on its free self-revelation, or else we would not even know that it is there. But this is not the case in Turner's apophatic theology. In fact, the One is a copy of the world as much as the world is a copy of the One:

> The fact of their having been caused by God is what permits the names of all things to be used of God. But what makes it not just permissible, but a *requirement* of theological adequacy that we should use all names of God, is the fact that since God is the cause of the whole created order, God possesses in his own being and in an uncreated manner all the perfections which he causes[.][45]

And in fact they belong to one and the same ontological structure. Although that structure as such cannot be adequately expressed in its being a 'whole', every expression of its parts moves us to the whole:

[44] Turner, *The Darkness of God*, 24.
[45] Turner, *The Darkness of God*, 23.

> The divine transcendence is therefore the transcendence even of difference between God and creation. Since there is no knowable 'distance' between God and creation, there is no language in which it is possible to state one. For all our terms of contrast state differentiations between creatures. There is none in which to state the difference between God and creatures. God is not, therefore, opposed to creatures, cannot displace them. . . .[46]

1.5.2. Graham Ward

Although in conversation with Derrida, rather than with Dionysius, and developing a considerably different kind of theology, we find a similar combination of apophatic and cataphatic theology in Graham Ward.[47]

Central to Ward's thinking is what he calls 'reading the signs of the times'. In practice, this means that throughout his writings, Ward draws much inspiration from cultural studies, linguistics and poststructural philosophy to develop innovative theological insights. This is already clear in his Barth book of 1995, in which he weaves Barth and Derrida together, and it returns in all of his later books. In one of his recent books, *Christ and Culture*, we see how this interest in culture is ultimately Christologically motivated:

> If all things exist in Christ, then the cultural is not something entirely separate from him; the culture is that through which God's redemptive grace operates. Christ we could say, is the origin and consummation of culture, in the same way as he is both the prototype and the fulfilment of all that is properly human.[48]

We see here immediately how the Christological is extended into an ontological existence of everything in God.

A totally negative concept of God as God is in Godself now enters the story as Ward's way of taking up the contemporary critique of a metaphysics of presence: we have no access to the things as such. There are only interpretations, as Ward states in his methodological reflection at the beginning of *Cities of God*:

> They [social theorists] accept that there is no immediate knowledge of brute data or the given. All our knowledge is mediated by the cultural

[46] Turner, *The Darkness of God*, 43.

[47] For a much more extensive discussion of Ward's work, see Wisse, 'Graham Ward's Poststructural Christian Nominalism', 359–373, of which this subsection is an excerpt adapted to the present argument.

[48] Graham Ward, *Christ and Culture* (Challenges in Contemporary Theology; Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 22.

> and linguistic codes within which we are situated. That position entails that all our knowledge is partial or from a particular perspective. There is no God's eye view of things, no access to a reality 'out there' beyond or behind our systems of communication which enable us to conceive of a reality to start with.[49]

This leads Ward to the adoption of a so-called standpoint epistemology. No one simply speaks the truth. Claims of truth are always embedded in a social-symbolic order and pursued in someone's interest. As we will see in more detail, Ward does not want to deny the specific standpoint taken by Christianity, but in fact he redescribes the structure of reality in Christian terms, in which brute facts are not given and all knowledge is mediated knowledge so that the redescription of reality as this mediating structure turns out to be the claim of Christianity, namely, the ontological structure of the Trinity.

In order to do this, Ward 'baptizes' poststructuralist deconstruction in a very specific way, a way that is most easily explained in terms of Derrida's concept of the sign. As I have indicated above, the starting-point of deconstruction is that the real, the given, is unavailable, is always beyond what we know. The presence of a sign means that the thing signified is absent. What we have is only a trace:

> All discourse, therefore, performs for Derrida the allegory of *différance*. Allegory names that continual negotiation with what is other and outside the text. In this negotiation language deconstructs its own saying in the same way that allegorical discourse is always inhabited by another sense, another meaning. Saying one thing in terms of another is frequently how allegory is defined. Saying is always deconstructive because it operates in terms of semantic slippage and deferral, in terms of not saying. In this respect, all acts of communication betray a similarity to negative theology: they all in saying something *avoid* saying something. Both allegory and negative theology, then, are self-consciously deconstructive; they are discourses in which the mimetic economy is conscious of itself. As discourses they perform the kenosis or emptying of meaning that *différance* names.[50]

The bridge towards the theological application is built in terms of a concise account of Ward's argument from his Barth book. Ward summarizes the argument from this book in his contribution to the *Cambridge Companion to Postmodern Theology*:

[49] Graham Ward, *Cities of God* (Radical Orthodoxy Series; London: Routledge, 2000), 17.
[50] Graham Ward, 'Deconstructive Theology', in Kevin J. Vanhoozer, editor, *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodern Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 80.

> If the triune God was other than the world that God created and yet also implicated in operating within that world, then Derrida's descriptions of a quasi-transcendental economy of signification might illuminate the nature of theological discourse itself. For theological discourse always and only functions within a generative revelation, given in Christ. But it can never function within a generative revelation as such. It can only employ those resources for signification handed down to theologians by the tradition and the particular historical and cultural discourses that contextualize any work.[51]

Almost at the end of the same contribution, the link between deconstruction and what Ward calls an 'analogical worldview' is summarized again:

> What Derrida draws us toward here is thinking about language in terms of creation and participation. He does not use the metaphor of incarnation, but the economy of discourse transgresses construals of inside and outside, immanent and transcendent, in a way analogous to the Christian understanding of the incarnate Word and the God who is not simply for us, but also with us and working through us. Conceived in this way, kenosis becomes the allegory of deconstruction while deconstruction becomes the allegory of all signifying economies. Kenosis is the condition for the possibility of deconstruction; the condition for the possibility of naming. Kenosis installs aporia, the ambiguity or metaphoricity that prevents language from strictly being denotational. Kenosis prevents language from being the transparent medium for identities and identification.[52]

As we have noted above, incarnational theologies in the wake of Plotinus and Hegel have difficulties doing justice to Christ as a concrete person at a specific point in time. Christology turns into a functional redescription of an incarnational ontology. Initially, however, particularly in a key article on Christology, Ward seems to avoid this trap by strongly emphasizing the distinction between the being of Jesus and the ontological nature of the world through a discourse circling around the category of 'displacement'.[53] The same notion is also featured in the Christology book *Christ and Culture*.[54] The leading idea here is that in all aspects of Christ's life and work, we see a

[51] Ward, 'Deconstructive Theology', 83.
[52] Ward, 'Deconstructive Theology', 87.
[53] The article is reprinted at least once: Graham Ward, 'Bodies: The Displaced Body of Jesus Christ', in John Milbank, Catherine Pickstock and Graham Ward, *Radical Orthodoxy: A New Theology* (Radical Orthodoxy Series; London: Routledge, 1999), 163–181; Ward, *Cities of God*, 97–116.
[54] Ward, *Christ and Culture*, especially the second part, titled 'Engendering Christ'.

'displacement' of the ordinary human aspects of Jesus. In the incarnation, certainly, Jesus became an ordinary human being, but at the same time his humanity was displaced, for example, in the sense that he did not share in the ignorance of ordinary children.[55]

Parallel to what we saw in Halfwassen's analysis of Hegel's Christology, however, Ward uses his emphasis on the displacement of Christ as a historical concrete individual for the purpose of construing a more general displacement of us all. Contrary to Christology proper, where Ward differentiates between ordinary human beings and the special displaced human being that is Jesus Christ, in his account of the soteriological significance, he construes again a parallel between the displacement of Christ, and the displacement of believers. Particularly in the eucharist, the displaced body of Jesus Christ becomes 'extended' to include other bodies and, in this way, constitutes the Church. Thus, from Christology to anthropology, all 'natural' and 'ordinary' views of human beings become 'displaced' as Christ shows their true nature in the displacement of his own body:

> It is not simply that the physical body of Jesus is displaced in the Christian story; our bodies, too, participate in that displacement in and through the crucifixion. At the eucharist we receive and we are acted upon: now, having been brought into relation and facing the acknowledgement of the breaking of that relation we recognize displacement of the body as part of Christian living.[56]

The Church then becomes a community of displacement, a community in which it is recognized that differences are not absolute and natural, but symbolic, and that these are to be respected in mutual love: the Church is defined as an erotic community.[57] Desire requires difference, and difference produces desire. The differences within the Church as an erotic community counter the 'atomic' differences that characterize our postmodern society in that they are embedded in the analogical worldview. Rather than the differences being disconnected and fragmentary without a unifying origin, the celebration of communion in difference within the Church is rooted in the Trinitarian unity in difference that God is. All differences thereby retain their analogical nature through this embedding in a Trinitarian framework.[58]

Here, again, we have the pattern full circle. Starting from a primary moment of negativity, this moment of negativity is combined with a mediating structure in which everything that is is construed as participating in the Real in a partial way. Thus, everything is part of the totality of being but in

[55] Ward, 'The Displaced Body of Jesus Christ', 164–165/Ward, *Cities of God*, 98–99.
[56] Ward, 'The Displaced Body of Jesus Christ', 171/Ward, *Cities of God*, 106.
[57] Ward, *Cities of God*, 152–156, 171–181.
[58] Ward, *Cities of God*, 172.

such a way that nothing within this totality may claim privileged access to the Real as such. This, then, turns out to be the soteriological upshot of this ontology: human beings find their ultimate destiny within a web of differences and they should refrain from claiming control over the totality of the Real. They are called for a relational communitarian way of living in relation. Christ is the paradigmatic expression of this soteriological aim.

Both Turner and Ward's work show how 'fake' in fact their emphasis on a negative theology is. Indeed, although epistemologically speaking, the 'Real' or 'God' is totally unknown in itself, it is linked to the known in such a way as to make it into a silent and harmless presupposition for the outflow of the totality of everything from the Real. In fact the Real is this outflow itself, from a moment of complete negativity into the known, and thus, it is in fact known rather than unknown.

1.6. Conclusion

As announced in the introduction to this chapter, this first chapter has functioned as a bridge between the overall introduction and the analyses of the various aspects of Augustine's theology in the following chapters. From the argument developed above, and playing with Augustine's programmatic opening sentences, one might say that in this work 'my pen is on the watch against those who' rethink Christian doctrine along the lines of a metaphysics of participation. Christian salvation would be the fact of this participation, and our task would be to live up to this fact.

In the next chapter, I will present an analysis of books 5–7 of *De Trinitate* in order to show how Augustine develops an alternative to this participatory view of the Trinity, how he maintains the knowability of God while at the same time putting great emphasis on the mystery and inexpressibility of God who is Trinity.

2

TRINITY

2.1. Introduction

In the previous chapter, we have made the transition between a general introduction to the argument developed in this book and the in-depth discussion of Augustine's view of the Trinity. We have touched on Augustine's view of the Trinity already, but primarily in terms of the sort of concept of God and the type of theology that he rejects, namely, one in which God is construed along the lines of the relationship between the Absolute and the world. We have developed Augustine's critique of Plotinus and Platonism more broadly into a critique of contemporary theologies. In this chapter, we will see how Augustine develops his view of the Trinity proper more positively, although it will become clear that even in Augustine's elaborate treatment of the Trinity elements of what we now call 'negative theology' still play a crucial role. In the next three sections (2.2 to 2.4), I will provide my own analysis of books 5–7. This reading will then be confronted with the ongoing debate on books 5–7 in recent literature, which is also the first step towards the systematic implications of these books for contemporary theology because, as we will see, scholarly readings of Augustine are strongly influenced by contemporary theological interests. Section 2.7 deals more extensively with the implications of Augustine's doctrine of the Trinity for systematic theology and the specific kind of negative theology that plays a key role in Augustine at this point. Finally, in section 2.8, these results are brought in conversation with a modern reception of Augustine's theology in terms of a discussion of Joseph Ratzinger's Trinitarian theology.

2.2. Book 5: I am who I am

At the end of book 4, Augustine makes a few remarks that shed light on the purpose and scope of books 5–7. He summarizes the result of books 1–4 by saying that the equality of Father, Son and Spirit has been sufficiently shown in the light of the scriptural witness to the missions of Father, Son and Spirit.

Subsequently, he announces the purpose of books 5–7 with the short remark: 'So let us conclude this volume. In those that follow we shall see with the Lord's help what sort of subtle crafty arguments the heretics bring forward and how they can be demolished' (4.32).

Gioia is certainly right when he emphasizes that books 1–4 and 5–7 belong together in that both deal with the exposition of the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity in the light of Scripture, as much with books 5–7 as with the earlier books.[1] Gioia's remark is a healthy correction to the systematic-theological attempt to read books 1–4 as dealing with scriptural prooftexts and books 5–7 with the 'doctrine of the Trinity proper'. For Augustine, there is no distinction between 'exegesis' and 'systematic theology', 'prooftexting' and 'speculation'.

Nevertheless, the end of book 4 and the beginning of book 5 make clear that Augustine sees some sort of break between these books, and, indeed, the beginning of book 5 shows that Augustine moves now from a discussion of the appearance of the divine persons in time to a preliminary attempt at seeing how far human discourse can get when it comes to speaking of the Trinity as it is in itself. This does not mean that Scripture is absent from now on, but the discussion of scriptural texts will focus on their implications for the relations between Father, Son and Spirit apart from their appearances in time.

Additional evidence for books 5–7 as a distinct unit within the work as a whole can be taken from the form of the argument. It seems that modern scholarship has not yet noticed that the discussion in books 5–7 has the form of a concentric circle. Not even Edmund Hill, who developed a concentric reading of the work as a whole, does so.[2] Beginning with the problems of how to speak about the Trinity, Augustine introduces the concept of God as *essentia*, along with the quotation of Exodus 3, which culminates in the question of what three the divine 'persons' are. In book 7, we see a similar pattern but then reversed. The second part of book 7 begins with the question of what three, proceeds with a quotation of Exodus 3 and ends with the question of how to speak about the Trinity who is God. In the middle of the concentric circles, one would find the end of book 6, with the discussion of Hilary and a remarkable passage that ends with a doxology and an 'Amen'. This centre is enclosed in the discussion of Christ as the Wisdom of God in book 6 and the first half of book 7.

Be this as it may, there is good reason to discuss books 5–7 as a separate unit that deals with a proper Trinitarian language. As we will see, it is also not false, although slightly anachronistic, to speak about 'the Trinity proper', because it is precisely in these books that Augustine develops a strong distinction between the way in which the Trinity is in itself and the external

[1] Luigi Gioia, *The Theological Epistemology of Augustine's De Trinitate* (Oxford Theological Monographs; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 24.

[2] Hill, 27.

relations of the Trinity to the world. As I will argue in this chapter, Augustine's defunctionalization of the Trinity might well turn him into the father of the distinction between what we now call the 'immanent' and the 'economic' Trinity. Augustine is in any case a theologian who reinforces rather than relativizes that distinction.

The question of who the Trinity, who is God, is in Godself, immediately raises the question of the possibility of any proper God-talk. This is evident from the proemium to book 5:

> From now on I will be attempting to say things that cannot altogether be said as they are thought by any human being – or at least not by us. Namely such in spite of the fact that our thinking, when we think about God the Trinity, by far improperly grasps the one about whom it thinks, nor comprehends him as he is; even by men of the calibre of the apostle Paul he can only be seen, as it says, *like a puzzling reflection in a mirror* (1 Cor 13:12). (5.1)

We encounter a cluster of terms here that Augustine uses when speaking about the incapability of humans to speak and think about God. We will come back to the implications they raise in section 2.7, when we discuss the specific form of negative theology that Augustine develops. The main distinction is threefold, speaking (*dicere*), thinking (*cogitare*) and comprehending God (*capere*). None of these succeed, but thinking of God is said to be more successful than speaking. This is probably because speaking divides things, ascribing attributes to God as separate aspects of God, as we will see in the remainder of this book, that are identical in God because of God's strict simplicity.

Apart from this main distinction, a few other aspects catch our attention. In a sentence that is perhaps only to be fully appreciated in the original Latin, Augustine expresses how far our thought about God (*cogitatio*) falls short of the one whom we think of. *Cogitatio* appears three times in this sentence: 'although our *thinking* when we *think* of God the Trinity, by far improperly grasps the one that it *thinks* of' (*quamuis et ipsa nostra cogitatio cum de deo trinitate cogitamus longe se illi de quo cogitat imparem sentiat*). In spite of the denial of the possibility of thinking of God as one ought, all the emphasis is placed in fact on the *cogitatio*. Augustine is here, as we will see again below, already introducing the second half of *De Trinitate*, where all the emphasis will be put on the proper *cogitatio* of oneself and, along with this, of God.

A final aspect of this quotation that strikes us here is the transition from a more or less philosophical conceptuality to Scripture. This transition is marked by another key term in Augustine's thought: *videre* and its derivative *visio*. We do not *see* God directly in our present still sinful condition – even after conversion – but we see *per speculum in aenigmate*, through a mirror in an enigma.

The metaphor of sight moves us from a philosophical discourse, in which the difficulty would be one of capturing a principle properly, to the discourse of Christian faith, in which the difficulty is less one of capturing a principle, but one of being in the proper moral condition for the vision of God, the overwhelming holy power of the Almighty, expressed in the Old Testament as the *KBD Adonai*. The concept of *vision* and its biblical roots are important because, as we will see, Augustine often uses language that moves us very far beyond everything, beyond number, beyond change, beyond everything. Still, what he intends is not a mere philosophical affirmation of the principle *finitum non capax infiniti*. In fact he denies this principle, as we will see in the next chapter. Human beings have been created in the image of God, and, although they are not capable of comprehending God, they are still able to touch (*attingere*) God through, as it were, a sixth sense. What keeps us away from seeing God is not our nature, but the defect of it through sin.

In the remainder of the proemium of book 5, Augustine introduces his emphasis on divine simplicity along with various hints towards what is to follow in the second half of *De Trinitate*. The interest in divine simplicity is evident:

> We will find it easier to excuse one another if we know, or at least firmly believe and maintain, that whatever we say about that unchanging and invisible nature, that supreme and all-sufficient life, cannot be measured by the standard of things visible, changeable, mortal and deficient. (5.2)

It is intertwined, however, with the connection between thinking properly of oneself and thinking properly of God. After contrasting the pride of those who think they can apprehend God through their own powers with those who seek the vision of God through the gift of grace,[3] Augustine links our understanding of the Trinity to our understanding of ourselves:

> In any case, what intellectual capacity has a human being got to grasp God with, if his own intellect with which he wishes to grasp him still eludes his grasp? If he does comprehend his own intellect, he should bear firmly in mind that it is the best thing in his nature, and then ask himself whether he can see in it lines, shapes, bright colors, space, size, distinction of parts, extension of bulk, movement from place to place, or anything of that sort. We certainly find none of these things in what we find to be the best thing in our nature, that is in our intellect, in which we hold however much wisdom we have the capacity for. (5.2)

[3] The question of grace in *De Trinitate* will be extensively dealt with in Chapter 6. Here, it is sufficient to note that the language of grace appears in a proemium, which was possibly added later.

In this quotation, we see books 5–7 as it were woven together with books 8–15. In books 8–15, the right understanding of one's own nature will be the key towards restoring the image of God created at, so to speak, the 'top of the mind'. The intellect is the part of a human being with which to apprehend God, and the better we understand ourselves the better we will be able to understand God (again the Latin term used here for understanding God is *capere*). The second half of *De Trinitate* will point out why this is so by showing that the lack of understanding ourselves is caused by the corruption of our self-love and self-consciousness through sin. As we will see in the discussion of book 10, the mind materializes itself by reducing itself to the images that it incorporates in the mind as a result of anxiety. These images need to be removed to get an adequate view of oneself and of God. At this point, the argument in book 10 aligns with the argument here in book 5, where any material images or concepts derived from the multiplicity of the created order are rejected.

The end of the prologue finishes with a paradoxical rendering of divine attributes and acts that remind us of the beginnings of the *Confessiones*:[4]

> So what we do not find in our better part we should not look for in that which is far and away better than our better part. Thus we should understand God, if we can and as far as we can, to be good without quality, great without quantity, creative without need or necessity, presiding without position, holding all things together without possession, wholly everywhere without place, everlasting without time, without any change in himself making changeable things, and undergoing nothing. Whoever thinks of God like that may not yet be able to discover altogether what he is, but is at least piously on his guard against thinking about him anything that he is not. (5.2)[5]

As I will argue below when dealing with Augustine's negative theology, Augustine's God is more mysterious than Plotinus' One, although, on the other hand, less mysterious because capable of revealing Godself to humans.

The process of a subtle transformation of a philosophical concept of God goes on in 5.3, where the main argument of these three books begins. Augustine accepts a philosophical concept for the Trinity that is rejected by Plotinus as proper to the One: the concept of substance (*substantia*). Still, Augustine will eventually rethink the concept along lines unfamiliar to the main philosophical schools. In a first step, he gives the concept of substance a specific meaning by denying that it can be used in conjunction with accidents when

[4] Cf. *conf*. 1.4.4.

[5] Hill insightfully notes that Augustine foreshadows his argument for God as without accidents here, because he runs through all Aristotle's nine categories of accidental predication. cf. Hill, 202.

speaking about God. Therefore, he prefers the term *being* or *essence* (*essentia*), although he continues to use the term *substantia* as a synonym:

> There is at least no doubt that God is substance, or perhaps a better word would be 'being'; at any rate what the Greeks call *ousia*. Just as we get the word 'wisdom' from 'wise,' and 'knowledge' from 'know,' so we have the word 'being' from 'to be.' And who can more be than he that said to his servant, *I am who I am*, and, *Tell the sons of Israel, He who is sent me to you* (Ex 3:14)? Now other things that we call beings or substances admit of accidents, by which they are changed to a great or small extent. But to God, nothing can happen (*accidere*) in any way, and therefore the substance or being which is God is alone unchangeable, and therefore it certainly pertains to him that he is being itself, for which reason he is called 'being' most truly and supremely. (5.3)

The quotation of Exodus 3 is crucial to the understanding of Augustine's affirmation of God as *essentia*. The reference to Exodus 3 reminds us of another passage in the *Confessiones*, the central passage from book 7, where Augustine says:

> O eternal Truth, true Love, and beloved Eternity, you are my God, and for you I sigh day and night. As I first began to know you you lifted me up and showed me that while that which I might see exists indeed, I was not yet capable of seeing it. Your rays beamed intensely upon me, beating back my feeble gaze, and I trembled with love and dread. I knew myself to be far away from you in a region of unlikeness, and I seemed to hear your voice from on high: 'I am the food of the mature; grow then, and you will eat me. You will not change me into yourself like bodily food: you will be changed into me.' And I recognized that you have chastened man for his sin and caused my soul to dwindle away like a spider's web, and I said, 'Is truth then a nothing, simply because it is not spread out through space either finite or infinite?' Then from a far you cried to me, 'By no means, for I am who am.' (*conf*. 7.10.16)

God speaks Gods own name, a name that reveals as much as it conceals. Although God is called 'Being itself', Augustine does not turn God into the principle of being. The only one who truly *is* is person-like. It is someone who speaks and to whom one can pray. This reinforces the mystery that God is. As we have seen at the beginning of the book, the Trinity who is God can be thought of, but cannot be spoken of in a proper way. This implies a limitation of the reproducability of God in speech. God is someone we meet in person, not by representation.

The second crucial step in book 5 is the introduction of relational language in order to do justice to the specific things that apply to the three divine 'persons' – more on that term below. The move is well known and we will encounter it again in our discussion of the secondary literature: Augustine solves the riddle of one God in three 'somethings' through the transformation of the category of relation. He does this to avoid an implication that he ascribes to the 'Arians', although we do not know exactly who these are. Their suggestion is that if everything in God is said according to substance then titles that specifically belong to the persons are also said according to substance, and hence, Father, Son and Spirit cannot be of the same substance. In order to refute this suggestion, Augustine does not introduce a new category, but a distinction between two ways of speaking: speaking of something as it is in itself (*ad se*) and speaking of something as it relates to other things (*ad aliquid*):

> With God, though, nothing is said according to accident, because there is nothing changeable with him. And yet not everything that is said of him is said according to substance. Some things are said with reference to something else, like Father with reference to Son and Son with reference to Father; and this is not said according to accident, because the one is always Father and the other always Son. (5.6)

The argument so far leads to what we could call the mantra of Augustine's doctrine of the Trinity. It is a mantra in the sense that it is often repeated but not functionally explained. The mantra acts like the definition of a riddle more than the explanation of who or what the Trinity is: the Father is God, the Son is God and the Holy Spirit is God, but nevertheless not three gods, but one God. This mantra is reached through the distinction between *ad se* and *ad aliquid*:

> The chief point then that we must maintain is that whatever that supreme and divine majesty is called with reference to itself is said according to substance; whatever it is called with reference to another is said not according to substance, but relatively; and that such is the force of the expression 'of the same substance' in Father and Son and Holy Spirit, that whatever is said with reference to self about each of them is to be taken as adding up in all three to a singular and not to a plural. Thus the Father is God and the Son is God and the Holy Spirit is God, and no one denies that this is said substance-wise; and yet we say that this supreme triad is not three Gods but one God. (5.9)

As we have said in the discussion of the secondary literature, many attempts have been made to trace the philosophical roots of Augustine's view, but the upshot is that Augustine does not follow one particular school. One might

rather say that Augustine carefully avoids the alignment of his view to any clear-cut philosophical scheme. We have already seen that Augustine rejects the category of *substantia* when speaking about the Trinity who is God preferring *essentia*. We see that he avoids the category of *relatio*, which, according to Aristotelian thought, belongs to the category of *accidentia*.

In what follows, we see that he also criticizes the concept of *persona* when it comes to the distinctness of the three divine 'persons'. No type of language, so it seems, fits the subject spoken of. The question of what three the three 'persons' are is closely related to Augustine's incorporation of the Nicene tradition. Augustine integrates this tradition in his own way and through this subtly modifies the Nicene tradition. Involved in this transformation of the Nicene tradition is a discussion of the received terminology in the Greek speaking tradition. Whereas in the Greek tradition *mia ousia, treis hypostaseis* received a distinct meaning that builds on a specific metaphysical distinction between the essence of something and the concrete existence of that essence in something or someone – see below in the discussion of Richard Cross' work – this specific meaning gets lost in the Latin tradition, in which both *ousia* and *hypostasis* are translated as *substantia* or *essentia*:

> But because we have grown accustomed in our usage to meaning the same thing by 'being' as by 'substance,' we do not dare say one being, three substances. Rather, one being or substance, three persons is what many Latin authors, whose authority carries weight, have said when treating of these matters, being able to find no more suitable way of expressing in words what they understood without words. . . . Yet when you ask 'Three what?' human speech labors under a great dearth of words. So we say three persons, not in order to say that precisely, but in order not to be reduced to silence. (5.10)

More is at stake, however. In the Greek-speaking tradition, subordinationism was rejected at Nicea, but mostly, the language of origin that was typical of subordinationist terminology was retained in a more or less unproblematic way: the Father was still called the *origo* of the Trinity, although this implies, if pushed hard enough, because interpreted as an *as se* statement, that the Son is substantially different from the Father and thus, that subordination would follow. This is precisely the point where Augustine feels himself pushed by the logic of the Arian opponents, effectively denying that the Father can be called the beginning or the origin of the Trinity according to substance:

> Coming now to the Father, he is called Father relatively, and he is also called origin relatively, and perhaps other things too. But he is called Father with reference to the Son, origin with reference to all things that are from him. Again, the Son is so called relatively; he is also called

> Word and image relatively, and with all these names he is referred to the Father, while the Father himself is called none of these things. (5.14)

We see in this quotation that Augustine explicitly states that the title 'Beginning' (*principium* in Greek *origo*) is to be interpreted as an *ad aliquid* expression, which means it does not denote that the Father is in the true and original sense 'God' and the Son and the Spirit derive their divinity from the Father. This all too clearly suggests subordination. As the mantra states, Father, Son and Spirit, all three independently, are God, although not three gods, but one God. The oneness of God is not guaranteed by Augustine by an appeal to the Father as the *origin* of the Trinity, but through an appeal to the one essence that is shared by all three 'persons'. This, as many scholars have noticed, and as I will argue below, leads to the radical incomprehensibility or even irrationality of the concept of God as Trinity, because the oneness of the Trinity is now in fact located 'nowhere'. It is located 'in' the three 'persons', but given that these are three, this location leads to a contradiction.

Augustine goes even further to deconstruct the concept of *principium*, however, because in what immediately follows, he applies it to the Son and the Spirit as well:

> The Son, however, is also called origin; when he was asked *Who are you?* He replied, *The origin, who is also speaking to you* (Jn 8:25). But surely not the origin of the Father? No, he wanted to indicate that he is the creator when he said he was the origin, just as the Father is the origin of creation because all things are from him. For creator is said with reference to creation as master is with reference to servant. And so when we call both the Father origin and the Son origin, we are not saying two origins of creation, because Father and Son are together one origin with reference to creation, just as they are one creator, one God. Furthermore, if anything that abides in itself and produces or achieves something is the origin of the thing it produces or achieves, we cannot deny the Holy Spirit the right to be called origin either, because we do not exclude him from the title of creator. It is written of him that he achieves, and of course he abides in himself as he achieves; he does not turn or change into any of the things that he achieves. (5.14)

Apart from the fact that this quotation shows that Augustine deconstructs the concept of *principium* when it comes to guaranteeing the oneness of God, we see now how he deconstructs it as a basis for a functional redescription of ontology in Trinitarian terms. The idea that only the Father is the *origo* or *principium* makes it possible to align ontology to Trinitarian language by seeing the Father as the *principium* or the origin of everything and the Son as the principle of its appearance in time. Thus, the internal relationships

between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit coincide with the external relationships between the divine persons. To put it in Rahner's terms: *origo*-language enables one to state that the immanent Trinity is the economic Trinity and the other way around. The Father alone is the origin and the one invisible in itself, whereas the Son is the revelation of this invisible Father in history, and the Spirit is the recognition of the Son as revealing the Father.

What Augustine does here, instead, is put all three 'persons' on the same level when it comes to their 'divinity'. The Son and the Spirit do not derive their divinity from the Father, but they have it in themselves. Likewise, all three divine persons are now also in the same configuration when it comes to their relationship to the world. This introduces what we now call the distinction between the immanent and the economic Trinity, because the relationship that the divine persons have among one another is now a different relationship from that of the Trinity to creation. And indeed, in this latter relationship, all three persons can be called *principium*.

The introduction of the distinction between the immanent and the economic Trinity raises the question of the difference between relative statements about the Trinitarian persons among one another on the one hand, and statements about the relations of the Trinity to the world on the other.

However, before we enter into this, we have to nuance the foregoing in the light of other passages in *De Trinitate* (and elsewhere outside *De Trinitate*). In spite of what Augustine is doing here, where we see him quite explicitly deconstruct *origo*-language, he still uses it elsewhere. It is safe to suggest that Augustine uses *origo*-language especially in the context of pneumatology, when the question at stake is whether the Spirit proceeds only from the Father, or also from the Son.[6] Only one time, however, does Augustine literally speak about the Father as the *principium divinitatis* 'or, if you want' *deitatis*, namely, in book 4: '[H]e did not however say, "whom the Father will send from me" as he had said *whom I will send from the Father* (Jn 15:26), and thereby he indicated that the source of all godhead, or if you prefer it, of all deity, is the Father' (4.29). The other references to *origo*-language occur in book 15, and they do not mention the concept explicitly.[7] Augustine retains the *origo*-language primarily for 'backward compatibility' with the tradition, and in the discourse about the internal relations between the divine persons, which is mostly very close to the interpretation of certain passages from

[6] For an overview of the key passages in *De Trinitate*, see Gioia, *Theological Epistemology*, 144–146. One should note Gioia's misreading of 2.9, however, of which Gioia suggests that Augustine would implicitly affirm the principal invisibility of the Father over against the visibility of the Son, thus affirming the functionalization that we described above. However, in this passage, this functionalization is rejected rather than affirmed, because the Son is likewise called invisible, immediately at the beginning of the quote.

[7] Cf. 15.12, the end, 15.29, the beginning, and 15.47, in the middle.

Scripture, especially the Gospel of John. The metaphysical functionalization, however, is rejected because of its subordinationist connotations.

Having dealt with the question of *origo*-language in Augustine, it is appropriate now to deal with another issue that flows from the argument so far: the relationship between relative language in the *immanent* Trinity and in the *economic* Trinity. The terms 'immanent' and 'economic' Trinity are not Augustine's, but, as we have seen, the salvation-historical dysfunctionalization of the Trinity in Augustine leads to a distinction between the internal relations in the Trinity and the external relations of the Trinity to creation. In the last part of book 5, this leads to all sorts of questions concerning especially the relationships of the Father and the Spirit to things in time. It is asked, for example, whether the Father can be the origin of the Spirit because the Spirit is not only the Spirit of the Father but also the Spirit of us. Earlier on, in 5.12, Augustine has already dealt with the question of whether the Trinity as a whole could be called 'Father', and whether the Trinity as a whole can be called 'Spirit', given that the Gospel of John speaks about God as Spirit.

All of these problems are prompted by Augustine's dysfunctionalization of Trinitarian language. In a functionalized doctrine of the Trinity, it is clear what the Father is, can and cannot do (e.g. be visible as the Father), what the Son is and can do and what function the Spirit fulfils. Such a functionalized Trinity is, however, often at odds with scriptural language because Trinitarian language is systematically not very precise in Scripture. By dysfunctionalizing the Trinity, Augustine creates new problems but is able to solve others. For example, in the old functionalized doctrine of the Trinity, one was forced to affirm that JHWH, the revelation of God in the Old Testament, was to be identified with the invisible Father in the new functionalized Trinitarian scheme. This raises problems, however, because it leads to subordination almost automatically. Therefore, in 5.12 as was just mentioned, Augustine corrects this view:

> [B]ut the Trinity cannot in the same way be called Father, except perhaps metaphorically with reference to creature because of the adoption of children. The text *Hear, O Israel: the Lord your God is one Lord* (Dt 6:4) is not to be understood as excluding the Son or excluding the Holy Spirit, and this one Lord we rightly call our Father as well because he regenerates us by his grace. (5.12)[8]

Augustine does the same with the Spirit. Although, on the one hand, all three divine 'persons' can indeed be called Spirit with regard to their relationship to creation, with regard to the specific appropriated role of the Holy Spirit within the Trinity, both immanently and economically, only the third person in the Trinity is to be called 'Spirit'.

[8] Cf. Hill's strongly evaluative footnote to this passage, Hill, 203.

Hence, we see that Augustine's dysfunctionalization of the Trinity raises all sorts of new questions, and one of those questions is the relationship between the Trinity and creation. Augustine speaks about *ad aliquid*-language between the Trinitarian 'persons', but he also speaks about *ad aliquid*-language between the Trinity and the creation. An interesting case in this regard is the core title of God in Scripture – Lord:

> But what about 'lord'? If a man is not called a lord except from the moment he begins to have a slave, then this relative term too belongs to God from a point of time, since the creation he is lord of is not from everlasting. But then how will we be able to maintain that relative terms are not accidents, since nothing happens to him in time because he is not changeable, as we established at the beginning of this discussion? Look, this is the problem: He cannot be everlastingly lord, or we would be compelled to say that creation is everlasting, because he would only be everlastingly lord if creation were everlastingly serving him. (5.17)

Entirely consistent with what he has already argued in book 5, Augustine rejects accident-language altogether in the case of God. Still, the title 'Lord' cannot belong to the essence of God either because, in that case, the creation would belong to the essence of the Trinity such as having a slave belongs to the essence of being lord. Like the relative language *in* the Trinity, the title 'Lord' is relative language denoting the relation between the eternal Trinity and the creation.

Two issues follow from this. First, it is interesting to see that for Augustine, relative language can be applied to both internal Trinitarian language and to external language concerning God and creation. This is all the more interesting because in the first case, there is a strong requirement of oneness, and, in the second, there is a strong interest to keep the two *relata* separate. Therefore, for Augustine, it seems more important to keep relative language away from substance language than to maintain the absolute oneness of God through relative language.

Second, the use of relative language concerning the Trinity and creation prompts a question from contemporary theology, namely, the question of God's relationship to God's revelation. The modern objection to the traditional concept of God is that it turns God into an immutable, static entity over against the world that is unable to be truly in relation to it because its essence is not involved in its historical dynamics.

Augustine does not address this in book 5. One way to address this issue is to point to the fact that the incomprehensibility of God as Augustine develops it in books 5–7 also renders God's relationship to the world incomprehensible. If the 'what' of the Trinity who is God is unknown, its 'boundaries' are also unknown and thus, it is just incomprehensible to say how God is involved

in the world because it is unknown how God is related to it. This reply is in line with, for example, Augustine's paradoxical way of speaking about divine 'attributes', as he does, for example, in the quote from the beginning of book 5, where Augustine speaks of God:

> Thus we should understand God, if we can and as far as we can, to be good without quality, great without quantity, creative without need or necessity, presiding without position, holding all things together without possession, wholly everywhere without place, everlasting without time, without any change in himself making changeable things, and undergoing nothing. (5.2)

It is even more so in the similar passage from *Confessiones* 1.4.4, where Augustine mentions a long list of paradoxical attributes that would not fit well into a standard theist perfect being theology.

Another response is possible, however. In this book, I rarely go beyond a sequential description of Augustine's argument. I think that it is generally crucial not to draw links between passages that Augustine does not make himself. However, at the end of this discussion of book 5, I make an exception to this rule. Book 9 provides a very interesting insight with regard to the question of how an immutable God can be involved in changing relationships with the world and human beings in it. In book 9, the problem is situated at the level of the just man, namely, how we evaluate the justice of the just man. This is because we see the justice of the just man in the truth itself, which is God who is above the mind. In 9.9, this leads to an interesting example, which I quote at length:

> From where, after all, is the fire of brotherly love kindled in me when I hear about some man who has endured severe tortures in the fine constancy of his faith? And if this man is pointed out to me, I am dead set at once on getting in touch with him, on getting to know him, on binding him to myself in friendship. . . . But now suppose that in our mutual conversation he confesses or carelessly betrays himself in some fashion as having unworthy beliefs about God and looking for some material benefit from him, and as having suffered what he did for some such mistaken notion, whether in the greedy hope of financial gain or the vain pursuit of human praise; immediately that love which carried me out to him is brought up short and as it were repulsed and withdrawn from an unworthy man; but it remains fixed on that form by which I loved him while I believed him to be like it. Except of course that I might still love him hoping that he may become like it, though I have discovered him not to be like it. Yet in the man himself nothing has changed; though it could change so that he became what I believed he already was. In my mind however there is a change from

> the estimation which I had of him to the one I now have of him; and at the bidding from above of unchanging justice the same love of mine is deflected from the intention of enjoying him to the intention of counseling him. But the form itself of unshaken and abiding truth, in which I would enjoy the man while I believed him to be good and in which I now counsel him to be good, continues unruffled as eternity to shed the same light of the purest incorruptible reason both on the vision of my mind and on that cloud of imagination which I perceive from above when I think of this man I had seen. (9.10)

Although in book 9, this is spoken of a human being, one might transpose this to the level of God, suggesting that it illustrates rather well how an immutable God may be really involved within worldly affairs without being changed by them. Of course, in God, an additional level of complexity comes in regarding the question whether not the fact of God's involvement as such already causes change in the sense of sequences of time and, therefore, an immutable God acting in the world is impossible anyway. This objection is far beyond the scope of my argument here. What I want to show is how Augustine could conceive of the relationship between God's immutable nature, on the one hand, and the way this immutable nature becomes known through and is involved in God's relationship to the world. Although God's essence is not, like in many twentieth-century theologies, codetermined by the history of the world, the immutable divine essence is still truly known through and involved in God's actions in the world, because these actions flow from and are consistent with God's essence.

2.3. Books 6 and 7: Christ, the Power and Wisdom of God

Book 6 continues along the lines of book 5 insofar as the notion of divine simplicity continues to govern Augustine's replies to those arguing for the inequality of Father, Son and Spirit. Scriptural material that suggests the inequality between the persons provides the starting-point, and the highest equality of the three persons in the one Trinity is the purpose of the exposition.

In book 6, the argument for the highest equality of Father, Son and Spirit (6.10) takes the form of a discussion of in fact a single biblical passage: 1 Cor. 1.24 'Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.' From the introduction to the problem discussed in book 6, it is already evident that Augustine builds on advanced developments in the Arian controversy. At this point, the front that Augustine faces is not only one with Arian sympathies, but also certain arguments from the orthodox side that were intended

to refute Arianism, but seemed to have problematic consequences for the orthodox position:

> Some people find it difficult to accept the equality of Father and Son and Holy Spirit because of the text, *Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God* (1 Cor 1:24). Equality seems to be lacking here, since the Father is not himself, according to this text, power and wisdom, but the begetter of power and wisdom. . . . But in the arguments which our people used to have with those who said 'There was a time when he was not,' they used to put forward this line of reasoning: 'If the Son of God is the power and wisdom of God, and God was never without power or wisdom, then the Son is coeternal with God the Father. Now the apostle does say, *Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God* (1 Cor 1:24), and it is crazy to say that there was a time when God did not have power or wisdom. Therefore there was no time when the Son was not.' (6.1)

As is evident from this quotation, an argument that can be useful to refute one heresy, may give rise to another: 'This argument, however, forces us to say that God the Father is only wise by having the wisdom which he begot, and not by the Father being in himself very wisdom' (6.2).

Various scholars have pointed to the problematic character of the argument in book 6 and the first half of book 7. The argument is interrupted by the discussion of Hilary of Poitiers and the final doxological passage at the end of book 6, but in fact, at first sight, book 6 and the first half of book 7 deal with the same biblical text and the same problem. Still, Edmund Hill, for example, is insistent on the fact that book 6 does not represent Augustine's final solution to the problem, but only a preliminary treatment.[9] Upon closer inspection, one cannot but agree with Hill. In this section, I will deal with both parts of the discussion of the Corinthians text, but I will not give an in-depth reading of the flow of the argument, because to modern readers this would make for tiresome reading.

The argument winds its way out until book 7 section 6 before Augustine finally resolves the issue and concludes with the mantra: the Father is God, the Son is God and the Spirit is God, but still not three gods, but only one God. And because in God, being wise is the same as being God, the mantra can be varied at will: the Father is wise, the Son is wise and the Holy Spirit is wise, still not three wise Gods, but one God who is supremely wise:

> So the Father is light, the Son is light, the Holy Spirit is light; but together they are not three lights but one light. And so the Father is wisdom, the Son is wisdom, the Holy Spirit is wisdom; and together they are not three wisdoms but one wisdom; and because in their case

[9] Hill, 186–187.

> to be is the same as to be wise, Father and Son and Holy Spirit are one being. Nor with them is to be anything else than to be God. So Father and Son and Holy Spirit are one God. (7.6)

As I mentioned already, this repetition of the mantra is the end result of a line of reasoning that has occupied Augustine for the whole of book 6 and the first half of book 7. Only from the beginning of book 7 does Augustine suggest that he is going to argue for the fact that the divine persons can be said to be wise in themselves rather than together:

> It is now time to examine more thoroughly, as far as God enables us to, the question we postponed in the previous book, that is, whether we can predicate of each person in the trinity by himself, and not just together with the other two, such names as God and great and wise and true and omnipotent and just and anything else that can be said of God with reference to self as distinct from by way of relationship; or whether these names can only be predicated when the trinity is meant. (7.1)

After this quotation, the Corinthians text is repeatedly cited as the central scriptural problem. Up until the end of book 6, therefore, the argument is not directed towards arguing for the mantra, but for a certain prestage of the mantra, namely, the claim that Father, Son and Spirit (together) are one God, of equal greatness, wisdom, omnipotence and justice. This is affirmed, but Augustine deliberately postpones this further move to book 7.

How much concern Augustine has in solving the problem of the Corinthians text becomes clear a bit later in book 7, when he mentions it again, and sketches the problematic consequences of its interpretation:

> This problem has arisen from the text *Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God* (1 Cor 1:24). So our desire to express the inexpressible seems to have forced us into the position where *[i]* we either have to say that Christ is not the power of God and the wisdom of God, and thus shamelessly and irreligiously contradict the apostle; or *[ii]* we admit that Christ is indeed the power of God and the wisdom of God, but that his Father is not the Father of his own power and wisdom, which would be no less irreligious, because in this case he will not be Christ's Father either, seeing that the power of God and the wisdom of God are Christ; or *[iii]* that the Father is not powerful with his power or wise with his wisdom, and who would have the nerve to say that?; or *[iv]* that to be for the Father and to be wise must be understood as two different things, so that he is not wise simply by being, and is thus in the same case as the soul which is sometimes unwise sometimes

> wise, being a changeable nature, and not supremely and perfectly simple; or *[v]* that the Father is not anything with reference to himself, and that not only his being Father but also his simply being is said with reference to the Son. How then can the Son be of the same being as the Father, seeing that his Father is not even being with reference to himself, but even his 'is' or his 'to be' is only a reference to the Son? (7.2)

This concern about the Corinthians text is strange, and, as far as I know, it has not yet been sufficiently clarified in the secondary literature as to why Augustine hesitates so much to give the straightforward conclusion that, in fact, follows smoothly from what he has already established. In book 5, all the building blocks for Augustine's view of the Trinity have already been provided and the mantra has already been introduced: the Father is wise, the Son is wise and the Spirit is wise. Likewise, the governing principle for dealing with essential attributes has already been introduced: divine simplicity. Therefore, it is hard to see why so much caution is needed before the conclusion, from 7.6, quoted above, could be reached.

It seems to me that the only reason for this is that Augustine feels that he is on dangerous ground here; this is probably so because he feels at this point that he is substantially at odds with the tradition. This is also what he admits at the beginning of book 6 when he says that some of the orthodox used this point to refute Arians with the idea that it is through the wisdom of the *Son* that the Father is wise, and hence the Son must be God as much as the Father. It is probably for this reason that Augustine takes an intermediary step towards refuting exactly this idea by first more or less accepting it in book 6, and only then, without explicit discrimination between the two approaches, refuting it in book 7.

To what extent Augustine feels that he is here on dangerous grounds is also evident from another aspect of especially these books that continues to frustrate scholars: the fact that Augustine omits the names of his conversation partners. Augustine does not enter into any explicit polemics with his opponents, neither the orthodox nor the heretics. Hilary is an exception in the sense that he is mentioned, but not in the sense of the rhetorics that are employed to work around his all too subordinationist terminology: in his discussion of Hilary, Augustine is equally cautious and subtly modifies Hilary's language to accommodate it to his own view.

Whatever the reason might be for putting so much energy in the refutation of the idea that the wisdom and power of the Father is in the Son, Augustine develops all sorts of arguments to refute it. I will skip them mostly, but one is particularly interesting. Book 7.2 is a key section in Augustine's argument anyway, but moreover, it provides a very interesting argument from the perspective of contemporary systematic theology. In this section, Augustine attempts to show the absurdity of the idea that the Father finds his essence in the Son by showing that relative predicates (*relative* or *ad aliquid* expressions)

are meaningless without underlying substantial predicates (*ad se* expressions). He develops this point from ordinary language:

> And this leads us to the most unexpected conclusion that being is not being, or at least that when you say being you point not to being but to relationship; just as when you say master, you point not to a being but to a relationship, which refers to slave; but when you say man, or anything similar that has reference to self and not to another, then you point to a being. . . . But if it were not, for example, a man, that is some substance, there would be nothing there that could be called master by way of relationship; (7.2)

The theological application follows most concisely at the end of 7.2:

> But if the Father too who begot wisdom becomes wise with it, and if for him to be is not the same as to be wise, then the Son will be a quality of his, not his offspring, and there will no longer be absolute simplicity in God. This however is unthinkable, since in fact we have there absolutely simple being. With God to be is the same as to be wise. If then in this case to be is the same as to be wise, it follows that the Father is not wise with the wisdom he has begotten; otherwise he did not beget it, but it begot him. (7.2)

The reason why this is interesting from an anachronistic point of view is that Augustine provides an excellent criticism of certain forms of a so-called relational ontology here. As we will see in section 2.8, when dealing with Joseph Ratzinger's view of the Trinity, the central tenet of certain forms of relational ontology is that the essence of a thing consists totally in its relation to something else, rather than in itself. Contemporary philosophers and theologians have already criticized this view as problematic because the concept of a relation presupposes something that exists apart from the relation, so that it can be said to be in relation to something else. Relations presuppose relata.[10] This is exactly Augustine's point.

Basically, the refutation has been completed, but Augustine is still concerned about the witness of Scripture. Why, if the Father cannot find his wisdom in the Son, but the Son has his wisdom from the Father while still also having it in himself, does Scripture speak so much about the wisdom of the Father as residing in the Son and in Christ? The solution he offers is a distinction between the wisdom that God gives in Christ as it pertains to us and the wisdom that God is, as Father, Son and Spirit, in Godself. Scripture mostly speaks

[10] Cf. Wendte, 'Entzogenheit in Gott', 181; Markus Mühling and Martin Wendte, 'Entzogenheit in Gott: Zur Verborgenheit der Trinität', in Mühling and Wendte, *Entzogenheit in Gott*, 1, 17–21.

about the wisdom and power of God with respect to our salvation, and it is for this reason that it speaks about the wisdom and power of God as something *of* God. Thus, Augustine reads Paul's 'wisdom of God and power of God' not as attributes, but as gifts of God. We see something return from book 5 at this point: the distinction between immanent relations within the Trinity, and economic acts of the Trinity in creation.

Having discussed Augustine's argument through book 6 and the first half of book 7, we are left with the centre of the concentric circle: the end of book 6. At the centre of this book 6, we find a strange passage. At this point, all of a sudden, Augustine introduces a conversation partner by name:

> Someone who wished to put in a nutshell the special properties of each of the persons in the trinity wrote: '*Eternity in the Father, form in the image, use in the gift*.' He was a man of no small authority in the interpretation of the scriptures and the defense of the faith – it was Hilary who wrote this in his book on the subject. (6.11)

A primary problem of this passage concerns the first part of the text that Augustine ascribes to Hilary: '*aeternitas in patre, . . .*'. This is not Hilary's text, which reads *infinitas in aeterno*. This fits much better into the flow of Hilary's text because the names of the divine persons have been mentioned immediately before the quotation, and the name of the Son and the Spirit do not appear again in what follows, and which clearly point to the Son and the Spirit: '*species in imagine, usus in munere*'. In addition, we do not have a text tradition from Hilary's *De Trinitate* that reads *aeternitas in patre*.[11] Hence, either Augustine read a text tradition that is now lost, or he incorrectly quoted Hilary from memory, or he changed the text deliberately.

Which one of these three possibilities is true is hard to establish, but in any case, it becomes clear that Augustine has some reservations about Hilary's words:

> So I have examined as best I could the hidden meaning of these words, that is of 'Father' and 'image' and 'gift,' 'eternity' and 'form' and 'use'; and I am afraid I do not follow him in his employment of the word 'eternity,' unless he only means that the Father does not have a father from whom he is, while the Son has it from the Father both to be and to be coeternal with him. (6.11)

What follows is a very careful and implicit but still determined correction to Hilary's, from Augustine's perspective, all too functionalizing view of the

[11] Hill, 215 is not completely clear about this, suggesting that only the Post-Nicene Fathers edition of Hilary has this version. However, in fact, there is no modern edition of Hilary that even mentions Augustine's reading in the critical apparatus.

Trinity. Hilary construes the Son and the Spirit all too easily as the visible image and gift of an invisible and eternal Father, which implies that the Image and Gift are different in essence from the eternity and invisibility of the Father. Subordinationism would follow. Hence, in his interpretation of Hilary's words, Augustine emphasizes the unity of the Trinity strongly, and in 6.12, he describes the unity, form and order that are imprinted upon the creation not as the form and order of the Father, but as the form and order of the Trinity as a whole.

In addition, although he seemed to have missed Hilary's claim to the Father's infinity, speaking about the eternity of the Father instead, Augustine mentions two times that all three persons in the Trinity are infinite in themselves:[12]

> Those three seem both to be bounded or determined by each other, and yet in themselves to be unbounded or infinite. But in bodily things down here one is not as much as three are together, and two things are something more than one thing; while in the supreme Trinity one is as much as three are together, and two are not more than one, and in themselves they are infinite. So they are each in each and all in each, and each in all and all in all, and all are one. (6.12)

Augustine ends book 6 with something that keeps a balance between polemics and doxology:

> Whoever sees this even *in part*, or *in a puzzling manner in a mirror* (1 Cor 13:12), should rejoice at knowing God, and should *honor and thank him as God* (Rom 1:21); whoever does not see it should proceed in godliness toward seeing it, not in blindness toward making objections to it. For God is one, and yet he is three. On the one hand the persons are not to be taken as muddled together in the text *From whom are all things, through whom are all things, for whom are all things*; and on the other, *not to many Gods, but to him be glory for ever and ever. Amen* (Rom 11:36). (6.12)

Here again, we see a clear example of Augustine's attempt at a subtle transformation of the tradition. The authority of Hilary and his orthodoxy is so much beyond debate that Augustine does not dare to call it into question. At the same time, he has so many problems with the all too functionalizing and,

[12] For a more elaborate treatment of Augustine and the infinity of God, see Adam Drozdek, 'Beyond Infinity: Augustine and Cantor', *Laval théologique et philosophique* 51 (1995), 127–140. My criticisms of this article have been described in a book by my Louvain colleague: Frederiek Depoortere, *Badiou and Theology* (Philosophy and Theology; London: T&T Clark International, 2009), 143–144.

therefore, in his view, subordinationist consequences of Hilary's terminology that he criticizes it implicitly, although retaining its formal authority.

2.4. Book 7: Which Three?

As already mentioned in the discussion of book 5, books 5–7 have a concentric structure. Hence, after having dealt with the central part of the structure, we come back to a theme that has already been introduced in book 5: what three are the three 'persons'? The style remains modest with many questions being asked and, only after careful reasoning, answers being given. The rhetorics of the argument confirm Kany's conviction that Augustine is not merely operating within the Nicene tradition. He is making an attempt at transforming it.[13] As such, this is nothing new because the Nicene tradition has always been a dynamic tradition. The Cappadocians transformed the original Athanasian conceptuality behind the creed, and so does Augustine to a certain degree develop an argument against the Cappadocian solution.

The whole argument is about scrutinizing the relationship between the oneness and the threeness in God. Augustine asks how the concept of 'essence' relates to the concept of 'substance', 'person', 'relation' and he deconstructs basically every attempt to bring them into some rational relationship. If Cross, as we will discuss below, is right in his reading of Gregory of Nyssa, Augustine does something opposite to Gregory. In *Ad Ablabium*, Gregory argues that a universal, 'tree', for example, is numerically single when we think about universals in the created order.[14] To Gregory, this is sufficient warrant for saying that this is the case in the Trinity too, so that the numerical oneness of God is sufficiently safeguarded through an appropriate account of universals. The way it works in the created order is the same as the way it also works in the case of the Trinity. This is by no means the only argument that Gregory advances against the Eunomian heretics, but it is certainly part of his argument.

Augustine does exactly the opposite. He deals with the way universals work in the case of creation extensively, but every time, he argues that the same does *not* apply to the Trinity. The decisive point in his argument is the same every time: the simplicity of God. Universals work the way they work in the creation because, in creation, to be is not the same as to have a certain attribute: in creation, a substance has accidents, whereas in the case of the Trinity, God has not.

[13] Kany, *Augustins Trinitätsdenken,* 502–505.

[14] Gregory of Nyssa, *Ad Ablabium*, the beginning and the end of the text, enclosing a significant emphasis on the unknowability of God as God is in Godself, which receives no attention whatsoever in Cross' reading of Gregory.

The parallel from the created order is introduced already in 7.7, but before it is introduced, the first parameter for true speech about the Trinity who is God is set. After having introduced the accepted terminology in the Greek and Latin tradition, Augustine goes on, speaking about the accepted terminology:

> That there are three is declared by the true faith, when it says that the Father is not the Son, and the Holy Spirit which is the gift of God is neither the Father nor the Son. So when the question is asked 'Three what?' we apply ourselves to finding some name of species or genus which will comprise these three, and no such name occurs to our minds, because the total transcendence of the godhead quite surpasses the capacity of ordinary speech. God can be thought about more truly than he can be talked about, and he is more truly than he can be thought about. (7.7)

As we see here, the *first* parameter is that God is three because Scripture teaches us about the Father, Son and Spirit as three distinct 'somethings'.

The parallel from creation follows. It is introduced through the examples of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. These are three distinct human persons. When it is asked what three these are, the answer is: three human beings. This is the way it works in creation: when asked what three, we refer to a concept that encompasses all three beings that we want to refer to and that captures their substance properly. Additional examples that Augustine discusses are horses and trees.

At the end of 7.7, Augustine already foreshadows his deconstruction of existing solutions, but only in passing, returning to his exploratory style in 7.8 and following. At the end of 7.7, he says:

> Here however there is no diversity of being, and so these three ought to have a specific name, and yet none can be found. For person is a generic name; so much so that even a man can be called person, even though there is such a great difference between man and God. (7.7)

The line of reasoning is this: if there is no difference of essence between the three persons, then there is no generic term that may capture the commonality between the three persons, because given that there is no accident in the one essence, there can be no concrete appearance of this essence that numerically differs from any one of the others. We have such things in trees or horses. What makes up different horses within the single class of horses are the accidents of the different horses, which makes them distinct from one another. Even if we take a completely hypothetical case in which three horses are precisely identical, they cannot also be at exactly the same place, and have exactly the same age, and so on. Therefore, three horses in one class will

always be distinct according to the accidents that make each horse different from the other. As soon as there would be no distinction between the horses, the class would stop being a class, because there would be only one member. This is what Augustine suggests. Given that there are no accidents in God, there cannot be a class, and, therefore, the name that we use for the three 'somethings' cannot be a generic name because there is only one member of the class. Therefore, we should look for a specific name for these three somethings, but we will not find any. The rest of the argument will show why.

As so often occurs, however, Augustine takes a step back and considers the idea of having a generic name for the three somethings. Why not three persons? Or why not one person because of the unity between Father, Son and Spirit? But then, if three persons, why not three essences or even three Gods? This last suggestion brings Augustine to a discussion of why 'three gods' was clearly rejected by the tradition, but not 'three persons':

> But neither do we find scripture talking anywhere about three persons. Perhaps because scripture calls these three neither one person nor three persons – we read of *the person of the Lord* (2 Cor 2:10), but not of the Lord called person – we are allowed to talk about three persons as the needs of discussion and argument require; not because scripture says it, but because it does not gainsay it. Whereas if we were to say three Gods scripture would gainsay us, saying *Hear, O Israel, the Lord your God is one God* (Dt 6:4). (7.8)

This is the *second* parameter that needed to be set. The first is: there are three and these cannot be identified with one another unless at the price of heresy. The second parameter is, however, that there can only be one. It is important to note that this second parameter comes from the Jewish Shema. Augustine's version of the doctrine of the Trinity is in fact driven by two major forces: the New Testament confession of the divinity of the Son and the Spirit on the one hand, and the Old Testament confession of the oneness of God in the Decalogue and the Shema. In this respect, the doctrine of the Trinity is not intended as a rejection or breach of Jewish monotheism. Quite the contrary. The specific form that Augustine's Trinitarianism takes, and more broadly that of the later Latin West, is a product of what one may call an interreligious dialogue between the Christian faith in Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, and the Jewish tradition.

It is significant to note that the two parameters mentioned return in the final prayer at the end of the work as a whole. The final prayer opens with the following summary of the rule of faith:

> O Lord our God, we believe in you, Father and Son and Holy Spirit. Truth would not have said, *Go and baptize the nations in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit* (Mt 28:19), unless you

> were a trinity. Nor would you have commanded us to be baptized, Lord God, in the name of any who is not Lord God. Nor would it have been said with divine authority, *Hear O Israel, the Lord your God is one God* (Dt 6:4), unless while being a trinity you were still one Lord God. And if you, God and Father, were yourself also the Son your Word Jesus Christ, were yourself also your gift the Holy Spirit, we would not read in the documents of truth *God sent his Son* (Gal 4:4), nor would you, only-begotten one, have said of the Holy Spirit, *whom the Father will send in my name* (Jn 14:26), and, *whom I will send you from the Father* (Jn 15:26). (15.51)

As is also clear from the opening of the prayer, Augustine formulates the rule of faith as two parameters, two limits that faith is certain of, namely, that God is three and one, but how these two are related, we do not know.

After having set the two parameters, Augustine returns to the question of why we are not allowed to speak about three essences or three persons if this is not forbidden by Scripture? Only three gods is forbidden, but what about the rest? Augustine shows that he is very sensitive to the contingent ways in which the established formulations of the tradition came into existence:

> What are we left with then? Perhaps we just have to admit that these various usages were developed by the sheer necessity of saying something, when the fullest possible argument was called for against the traps or the errors of the heretics. Human inadequacy was trying by speech to bring to the notice of men what it held about the Lord God its creator, according to its capacity, in the inner sanctum of the mind, whether this was held by devout faith or by the least amount of understanding. It was afraid of saying three beings, in case it should be taken as meaning any diversity in that supreme and ultimate equality. On the other hand it could not say that there are not three somethings, because Sabellius fell into heresy by saying precisely that. (7.9)

The balance is a historical balance, arisen out of the contingencies of the debate. Therefore, before making progress through a radical deconstruction of any common term underlying the three 'somethings', Augustine repeats the parameters once again:

> For it is known with complete certainty from the scriptures and is thus to be devoutly believed, and the mind's eye can also achieve a faint but undoubted glimpse of the truth, that the Father is and the Son is and the Holy Spirit is, and that the Son is not the same as the Father is, nor is the Holy Spirit the same as the Father or the Son. So human inadequacy searched for a word to express three whats, and it said substances or persons. By these names it did not wish to give any idea

> of diversity, but it wished to avoid any idea of singleness; so that as well as understanding unity in God, whereby there is said to be one being, we might also understand trinity, whereby there are also said to be three substances or persons. (7.9)

Again it is striking how Augustine does not solve the problem, but repeats the limits of Trinitarian language, especially when he says that 'diversity is not meant, but singleness is denied' (*quibus nominibus non diversitatem intellegi voluit sed singularitatem noluit*).

But then, the decisive step follows that destroys the conceptual space allowed so far for those who want to think the relationship between the essence and the persons along the lines of a theory of universals:

> Of course, if it is the same for God to be as to subsist, then it ought not to be said that there are three substances any more than it is said that there are three beings. It is because it is the same for God to be as to be wise that we do not say three wisdoms any more than we say three beings. So too, because it is the same for him to be God as to be, it is as impious to talk about three beings as about three Gods. (7.9)

Here we find a clear refutation of Gregory of Nyssa's solution, and in Augustine's identification of *esse* and *subsistere* in God, we find an interesting precursor to Aquinas' definition of God as *ipsum esse subsistens*. The Trinitarian persons cannot be three hypostases in the sense of one essence subsisting in three persons, because this violates the rule of simplicity and turns the one essence that God is into three subsisting Gods. From this, it follows that the Son is not completely equal to the Father because differing from the Father according to that which makes him a different subsisting person from the Father, and, thus, a different subsisting being.

The refutation leads to a further reflection on the question of whether God can be said to subsist at all, which Augustine denies because the language of subsistence violates the simplicity of God:

> But if God subsists in such a way that he can properly be called substance, then something is in him as in its underlying subject, and he is not simple – he for whom it is the same thing to be as to be whatever else is said of him with reference to himself, such as great, omnipotent, good, and anything of that sort that is not unsuitably said of God. . . . So it is clear that God is improperly called substance, in order to signify being by a more usual word. He is called being truly and properly in such a way that perhaps only God ought to be called being. He alone truly is, because he is unchanging, and he gave this as his name to his servant Moses when he said *I am who I am*, and, *You will say to them, He who is sent me to you* (Ex 3:14). (7.10)

This leads us back to the opening phrases of book 5, where Augustine started from the Exodus 3 to argue that God is a substance without accidents, and, therefore, most appropriately called an essence rather than a substance.

In 7.11, Augustine discusses a few remaining attempts to align the one essence to the persons according to a common term encompassing the three persons, for example, three species belonging to one genus, but he rejects them all as violating the oneness of God. An interesting case is the question of whether the one essence can be thought along the lines of the way in which three statues consist of the same gold. This, in fact, is also an example that appears in Gregory of Nyssa's *Ad Ablabium*.[15] It receives a quick refutation, however:

> So although with three golden statues we rightly say three statues, one gold, we do not say it in such a way that we understand gold to be the genus and statues the species. Well now, it is not in this way either that we talk about the trinity as being three persons or substances, one being and one God, as though they were three things consisting of one material, even if whatever that material might be it were wholly used up in these three; for there is nothing else, of course, of this being besides this triad. (7.11)

We have had ample evidence of the mysterious character of the confession of God as Trinity in books 5–7. I will come back to the systematic-theological consequences of this mysterious character of God in the next section. As far as Augustine is concerned, the mysterious character of our Trinity language gives room for a certain degree of flexibility provided that what is said is sufficiently qualified. It is this emphasis on flexibility that marks the very end of book 7:

> However, it is now generally agreed to use the plural with other names besides those signifying relative terms, as required by the necessities of argument, in order to have a name to answer the question 'Three what?' with, and so to say three substances or persons. But when we use such words we must remember not to think in terms of mass and space, nor to take it that one is even a little bit less than another, in whatever way one thing can be less than another, not even by the distance of even the slightest dissimilarity or of place. There must be neither confusion or mixing up of the persons, nor such distinction of them as may imply any disparity. If this cannot be grasped by understanding, let it be held by faith, until he shines in our minds who said through the prophet, *Unless you believe, you will not understand* (Is 7:9). (7.12)

[15] Cf. Kany, *Augustins Trinitätsdenken,* 504–505.

2.5. Books 5–7 in Recent Scholarship

Now that we have established an interpretative framework for reading books 5–7, we are in a position to take on the challenge of existing and widely diverging scholarship on these books. Much has been going on in the discussion concerning Augustine's doctrine of the Trinity. Until recently, modern scholarship tended to be very critical of Augustine. This was especially so in systematic theology, where those advocating the so-called Trinitarian renaissance used to make Augustine responsible for the so-called *Trinitätsvergessenheit*.[16] Augustine was accused of emphasizing the one substance or essence of God so much over the three persons that this reinforced the rise of theistic monotheism in Western culture. Likewise, Augustine was alleged to teach a fourth category in the Trinity, the essence that the three persons have in common, standing *behind* the persons in Augustine's construal.[17] The *de deo uno* came to precede and take precedence over the *de deo trino* as it does in Thomas Aquinas, and, thus, the doctrine of the Trinity became a superfluous addendum to an otherwise simply monotheistic doctrine of God.[18]

In historical scholarship, the critique of Augustine's doctrine of the Trinity went back to what is now called the 'De Regnon thesis', after the French father of the thesis: Théodore de Régnon.[19] This thesis entails that there is a divide between Eastern Christianity, which is characterized by starting from the three persons and communion in the Trinity, and Western Christianity, in which all emphasis is on the one essence of God. In the meantime, the De Regnon thesis has been seriously questioned[20] and so have the systematic-theological critiques of Augustine's doctrine of the Trinity.[21] One can find elaborate critiques of traditional scholarship as well as summarizing overviews at various places.[22]

As such, however, this recent scholarship has been the basis of a new interpretation of Augustine's doctrine of the Trinity, a new interpretation that is strongly characterized by an attempt at rehabilitation. Hanby calls it the

[16] Cf. Schwöbel, 'Renaissance of Trinitarian Theology', 1–30.

[17] A classic at this point is Colin E. Gunton, 'The History: Augustine, the Trinity and the Theological Crisis of the West', in Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, 31–57.

[18] See below, where we discuss Ratzinger as an example of this reading of the Western tradition. Ratzinger follows Rahner at this point.

[19] Cf. Théodore de Régnon, *Études sur la Sainte Trinité* (Paris: Victor Retaux, 1892–1898).

[20] Michel René Barnes, 'De Regnon Reconsidered', *Augustinian Studies* 26 (1995), 51–79.

[21] For an overview, see Kany, *Augustins Trinitätsdenken,* 364–383.

[22] Recent ones, not mentioned by Kany, include Scott A. Dunham, *The Trinity and Creation in Augustine: An Ecological Analysis* (SUNY Series on Religion and the Environment; Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2008); Keith Edward Johnson, 'A "Trinitarian Theology of the Religions"? An Augustinian Assessment of Several Recent Proposals' (Ph.D. thesis, Department of Religion, Duke University, 2007), URL: http://hdl.handle.net/10161/190.

'revisionist' reading.[23] When traditional scholarship was mostly characterized by a reconstruction of Augustine's doctrine of the Trinity as an anomaly, and an exaggerated emphasis on the oneness of God, or a Trinitarian doctrine in which the immanent Trinity is emphasized at the cost of the economic Trinity, those criticizing this traditional reading tend to rehabilitate Augustine through an emphasis on the salvation-historical aspects of Augustine's theology. It is useful to take a closer look at some of the most recent trends in these attempts at rehabilitation. As I will argue below, some of the attempts at rehabilitation of Augustine overemphasize certain aspects of his theology because they fit better into a twenty-first theological agenda, but do so at the cost of historical accuracy. In addition, the revisionist readings seem to align Augustine's theology too easily to the 'Nicene tradition' in general, ignoring the specific contribution that Augustine offers to this tradition, including an internal development and criticism of it.

In spite of all the criticisms of traditional scholarship, the revisionist reading is by no means the only current reading of Augustine's doctrine of the Trinity. Some still hold that the traditional critique of Augustine as too much focusing on the one immutable essence of God is true. Against the background of the revisionist interpretation in the Anglo-Saxon world and the influence of the late Basil Studer on this reading of Augustine, it is remarkable that it is precisely Basil Studer who, more or less, returns to the old school reading in his monograph on *De Trinitate*.[24] In the heading to a section, Studer goes so far as to speak of a 'unitarian tendency' in Augustine's doctrine of the Trinity.[25] Studer claims that it also comes to the fore in the fact that Augustine accepts the term *una substantia/essentia* for the Trinity and criticizes the term *persona*. He sees it also appear in Augustine's rejection of the analogy of the family, whereas the analogies that Augustine accepts are taken from an individuum. These are all issues that appeared in traditional scholarship as the basis for accusing Augustine of 'unitarianism'. In a small subsection at the end, Studer brings in traditional scholarship, and confirms it:

> With an eye to these results, one can understand the criticisms that have been put forward against Augustine's doctrine of the Trinity during the last few decades. It is not false, when people evaluate the principle of *omnia opera ad extra communia sunt* or the view of the *inseparabilitas personarum* as being exaggerated. K. Rahner's objection of the 'equalisation of the persons', appears in this light as justified.

[23] Michael Hanby, *Augustine and Modernity* (Radical Orthodoxy Series; New York: Routledge, 2003), 1.
[24] Studer, *Augustins De Trinitate*, 186–189.
[25] Studer, *Augustins De Trinitate*, 186.

> Likewise, the objection of 'essentialism' is correct, according to which everything circles around the essence.[26]

Why Studer opts for this old-fashioned interpretation of Augustine's theology, in spite of the widespread criticism of it, is not clear to me, especially because it is in conflict with the strong emphasis on the salvation-historical aspects of Augustine's 'doctrine' of the divine missions elsewhere in Studer's work. Studer's work on the divine missions in books 2–4, which we will discuss in the next chapter, was a major source of inspiration for Ayres and Barnes, two major figures behind the 'revisionist' reading. To this reading, we will now turn.

2.5.1. The 'Revisionist' Reading

When it comes to the classical objection that the essence is a fourth god behind the persons in Augustine's doctrine of the Trinity, we find the initial attempt at rehabilitation already in Rowan Williams' often quoted essay from 1990, '*Sapientia* and the Trinity':

> What should be particularly noted is that Augustine, so far from separating the divine substance from the life of the divine persons, defines that substance in such a way that God cannot be other than relational, trinitarian. Because the divine life in its coming forth to creation can only be grasped as self-imparting, *sapientia* and *caritas* are inseparable; and *caritas* is inconceivable without relatedness. If God is eternal wisdom, he is eternal love. The divine essence is not an abstract principle of unity, nor a 'causal' factor over and above the hypostases: to be God at all is to be desirous of and active in *giving* the divine life. That is the essence, the definition of God for our purposes; there is no 'divinity' not constituted by the act of *caritas*, and thus no divinity that can adequately be conceived apart from the trinity of persons.[27]

What is interesting in this quote is the close link that Williams draws between books 5–7, on the one hand, and books 8–15, on the other. Williams weaves relatedness, being truly relational and desirous of love and being directed towards us, intimately together in a way that sounds more like a twentieth-century post-Barthian relational theology than Augustine's account of the Trinity. Unfortunately for Williams, in Augustine, the love between the divine persons does not get that much attention, and the notion of the immutable

[26] Studer, *Augustins De Trinitate*, 189, my translation.

[27] Rowan Williams, '*Sapientia* and the Trinity: Reflections on the *De Trinitate*', in B. Bruning, M. Lamberigts and J. van Houtem, editors, *Collectanea Augustiniana: mélanges T. J. van Bavel* (Bibliotheca ephemeridum theologicarum Lovaniensium 92; Leuven: Peeters, 1990), 325.

and non-related essence plays at least as big a role as the relatedness of the divine persons. In addition, the idea that to be God is to be desirous of love towards *creation* is rather alien to Augustine's frame of reference because one of the key convictions underlying Augustine's theology is that God has no desire for anything at all. Williams emphasizes the relational character of the immanent Trinity more than Augustine does, and he links up the immanent and the economic Trinity in a way that reflects twentieth-century theological interests. As we have seen above and will elaborate on below, Augustine's theology is precisely characterized by a tendency to separate the internal and external relations in the Trinity.

This reveals something of the logic of rehabilitation. In an attempt to bring Augustine's Trinitarian doctrine to reappreciation among twentieth-century theologians, Williams formulates Augustine's doctrine in their beloved terminology. Williams is more or less aware of this. At the beginning of his essay, he says:

> As always, the reader of Augustine must allow for the difficulties caused by his diffuse exposition and reluctance to settle on a single technical vocabulary, as also for the undeniable fact that his rhetoric remains Platonic and dualistic even when the substance of his thought is moving in a quite other direction.[28]

In a footnote to this quotation, Williams refers to a book by Joseph O'Leary, who argues that Augustine dismantles a metaphysic of timeless spirit rather than simply reproducing the 'ontotheology' of Plotinus and Porphyry. It is clear how sensitive these expressions are to contemporary theological issues.

Barnes and Ayres, however, especially when their arguments touch on Augustine's doctrine of the Trinity proper, books 5–7, take a more historical approach, but still their targets are pretty much the same. In the Anglo-Saxon context, these are particularly systematic theologians such as Catherine LaCugna and Robert Jenson in the United States and John Zizioulas and Colin Gunton in the United Kingdom. Given that at the time of this writing, Ayres' monograph on Augustine's Trinitarian theology has not yet appeared, a key essay is still his 'The Fundamental Grammar of Augustine's Trinitarian Theology'.[29]

The title is instructive because Ayres' aim is to show the *grammar* of Augustine's Trinitarian theology. This grammar, Ayres argues, is the grammar of the Nicene tradition, especially two widely accepted tenets of the Early Church doctrine of God. First, this is the axiom of Trinitarian theology

[28] Williams, '*Sapientia* and the Trinity', 318.

[29] Lewis Ayres, 'The Fundamental Grammar of Augustine's Trinitarian Theology', in Robert Dodaro and George Lawless, editors, *Augustine and His Critics: Essays in Honour of Gerald Bonner* (London: Routledge, 2000), 51–76.

that the three persons work inseparably *ad extra*, and, secondly, it is the logic of the simplicity of God. Especially the logic of simplicity provides Ayres with the key towards refuting the charge of a divine essence that would be prior to the persons in relation. Through the introduction of the category of relation, Augustine enables one to say what each of the divine persons is in essence, while still retaining the distinctness of each person over against the others. After outlining Augustine's argument in book 7 in three steps, Ayres sums up:

> In summing up the result of these three steps, we can say that the Father generates the Son who is light from light, wisdom from wisdom and essence from essence. The Son is an essence in Himself, not just a relationship: to speak of the person of the Son is to speak of the Son's essence. And yet, because the Father's and the Son's essence are truly simple, they are of one essence. Because the principles of his trinitarian faith tell him that the Spirit is also God and is a distinct person, the same arguments apply to all three persons. Thus, in using the grammar of simplicity to articulate a concept of Father, Son and Spirit as each God and as the one God, we find that the more we grasp the full reality of each person – the full depth of the being that they have from the Father – the more we are also forced to recognise the unity of their being. We do not identify the unity by focusing on something other than the persons: it is focusing on the persons' possession of wisdom and being 'in themselves' that draws us to recognise their unity. The triune communion *is* a consubstantial and eternal unity; but there *is* nothing but the persons.[30]

Earlier on, Ayres has described this grammar of Augustine's Trinitarian theology as a 'coherent' language:

> Augustine's primary concern throughout this argument is to demonstrate the appropriate structure of a coherent language in trinitarian theology: we can now understand more clearly how to talk about the Trinity, and how to interpret scriptural texts about God, without falling into the most irreducible incoherence, all the while preserving the principles of the unity and distinctness of the persons.[31]

I accept Ayres' argument against the idea that the essence is something prior to the persons – Ayres refers to a very clear passage in *ep*. 120, where Augustine rejects the idea of the essence as a sort of fourth person himself.[32] In

[30] Ayres, 'Fundamental Grammar', 66–67.
[31] Ayres, 'Fundamental Grammar', 64.
[32] Ayres, 'Fundamental Grammar', 62.

addition, Ayres is to be commended for showing a keen awareness of the differences between Augustine's doctrinal thought and modern post-Hegelian relational thinking.[33] Thus, Ayres avoids the trap of a post-Hegelian relational rehabilitation of Augustine, as we saw above in Rowan Williams.

In Ayres's case, my worry is about the idea of 'coherence'. Apart from the objection of an essence prior to the persons, one of the classic objections to Augustine's doctrine of the Trinity is, namely, that it is incoherent.[34] Augustine himself is more or less aware of this problem and makes this clear in various ways. It is visible, for example, in his concerns about precisely what the persons are and how they ought to be called, sticking to three somethings (*tria quaedam*) in order to say something rather than nothing. It is also visible in the quote Ayres himself gives from *ep*. 120, where Augustine stresses the 'ineffability' of the Trinity.

But it is also visible on a more systematic internal level, within the construction of the Trinitarian grammar itself: in the end, if the persons are what they are in relation to one another and they share a common essence, *and this is a numerically single* essence, it seems the relations between the persons are relations to self rather than to one another. Ayres ignores this problem entirely, but especially for systematic theologians, it is a point of major concern. In the view of scholars such as Gunton, but as we will see at the end of this chapter, also someone like Ratzinger, it means that Augustine's theology does not take the threeness in God as the real clue to the understanding of God. This is especially so when we consider the fact that the analogies drawn from the created order in the second half of the work take their point of departure from a single individual human being. There is a slight recognition of these problems in Ayres' repeated assertion that Augustine does not intend to comprehend the divine essence,[35] but the ambiguous meaning of 'comprehend' in this context and the assertions of a coherent argument at least blur this reservation.

2.5.2. Richard Cross

In the light of the question of conceptual coherence and logical consistency, the work of another recent scholar turns out to be particularly interesting: Richard Cross. Cross is both an analytic philosopher of religion, a specialist in medieval philosophical theology, and shows a strong interest in the Early

[33] Lewis Ayres, *Nicaea and Its Legacy: An Approach to Fourth-Century Trinitarian Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 404–414. I am not completely sure, however, whether Ayres is sufficiently aware of the scope of Hegelianism in modern scholarship, including his own.

[34] See, for example, Mühling, section 2.2.2.2, building on much earlier research. Mühling speaks of a 'mystification' of Augustine's doctrine of the Trinity.

[35] Ayres, 'Fundamental Grammar', 52, 67.

Church. In a series of articles published in various journals,[36] Cross has brought his broad expertise to bear on the questions of a Trinitarian divide between East and West, both dealing with aspects of Trinitarian theology in contemporary systematic theology and questions of the historical interpretation of the Church Fathers, especially Gregory of Nyssa and Augustine.

Cross takes his point of departure in a specific reading of Gregory of Nyssa.[37] According to this reading, Gregory of Nyssa advocated an innovative view of universals, over against the standard (primarily Neoplatonic) way of thinking about them. In a Neoplatonic view of a universal, a universal is a collection of properties that brings together certain particulars in one set of things. This collection is divisible into its particular parts. All trees share the universal of treeness, and each tree is a member of the set of trees.[38] This Neoplatonic view was a standard objection to the *homoousios*, because it seemed that if the three persons shared a common divine nature, then this divine nature as a universal was divisible into its parts and, therefore, ends up in tritheism. As a reply to this, Gregory defends that a universal is numerically single, not only in the case of God, but also in the case of universals in the created order. Thus, the persons are distinct concrete divine hypostases who share a common divine nature, and this divine essence is one in the sense that it is a universal that is in every hypostasis one and the same universal. This universal, then, has no existence of its own because it has only concrete subsistence in the persons and does not exist apart from them. Thus, there is one numerically single divine essence in three hypostases.

Armed with this innovative understanding of the divine nature as a universal, Cross addresses the question of a division between East and West.[39] Cross acknowledges that Augustine rejects the analogy of three of a kind in book 7 of *De Trinitate*, but he argues that this is only because Augustine works with the standard Neoplatonic view of universals, according to which universals are divisible into their parts, and thus, provide no sufficient guarantee for the unity of the divine essence. Still, Cross holds, East and West are in agreement that the three persons are really distinct and share a common divine essence that is not prior but posterior to the divine persons. Here, he agrees with Ayres and Williams. Where he goes beyond Ayres and Williams

[36] Richard Cross, 'Two Models of the Trinity?', *Heythrop Journal* 43 (2002), 275–294; Richard Cross, 'Gregory of Nyssa on Universals', *Vigilae Christianae* 56 (2002), 372–410; Richard Cross, 'On Generic and Derivation Views of God's Trinitarian Substance', *Scottish Journal of Theology* 56:4 (2003), 464–480; Richard Cross, '*Quid Tres?* On What Precisely Augustine Professes Not to Understand in *De Trinitate* 5 and 7', *Harvard Theological Review* 100:2 (2007), 215–232.

[37] Cross, 'Two Models of the Trinity?', 275–294.

[38] In the article in the *Heythrop Journal*, Cross relates this view also to analytic philosophy, notably Bertrand Russell, Cross, 'Two Models of the Trinity?', 277–279.

[39] Cross, 'Two Models of the Trinity?', 282–285.

is that he suggests that due to the common Nicene basis behind both East and West, Augustine should have no objection against accepting Gregory's solution to the problem of threeness and oneness in God if he would accept Gregory's theory of universals because this would sufficiently guarantee the unity of God.

In my opinion, Cross reconciles Gregory and Augustine too easily at this point.[40] Cross himself admits at various times that one could accuse Gregory of tritheism in one way or another.[41] The reason is that in spite of the numerical oneness of the divine essence in Gregory, the three persons turn out to be three concrete instantiations of that single divine essence. The single divine essence is numerically single, but it receives concrete existence in three distinct concrete substances. The single essence is merely a concept. The persons should really be distinct centres of action, as Cross wrote me in an email conversation. Cross holds that Gregory, in order to guard himself against the objection, could appeal to the unity of action among the divine persons. For Augustine, such a guarantee of the unity of God would be far too weak because, for Augustine, God must not only be one in the sense of a unity of action but also in the sense of being numerically one, and this in the sense of one divine essence, not in the sense of a universal, but in some sense a 'single entity'. Of course, as we have seen above, this must be stated with many reservations because the Trinity is also three, really and at the same level.

The terminological problems between East and West play a role here, because the conceptuality of *una essentia, tres personae* in the West suggests no philosophical link between the concept of essence and the concept of person. It is no accident that Augustine hesitates about both the concept of substance and the concept of person when speaking of the Trinity. In book 7, as I have argued, Augustine rejects all ways of rendering the relationship between the essence and the persons philosophically coherent. This is why, in the end, he can live with a provisional and unsatisfactory solution like 'three somethings'. In the Eastern tradition, however, the one essence as having concrete subsistence in three divine hypostases is indeed compatible with the philosophical conceptuality of the time, although perhaps it has to be corrected for its all too tritheistic implications.

[40] In addition, I would suggest that Cross too easily ignores the profound level of negative theology that follows in Gregory's *Ad Ablabium* after he has advocated his theory of universals. The theory of universals that Cross takes up is really no more than a theory 'if we have to say anything'. Indeed, although Gregory's negative theology takes a different shape from Augustine's, both Church fathers show quite a degree of common awareness that when speaking of the Trinity who is God, we end up with saying things that we cannot fully think through conceptually.

[41] Cross, 'Two Models of the Trinity?', 288–289; Cross, 'Gregory of Nyssa on Universals', 408–409.

2.6. Change and History

One issue that catches one's attention when reading books 5–7 is the question of change in God. It is no surprise that twentieth-century revisionist scholars have paid so much attention to books 2–4, where Augustine deals with aspects from salvation history. Books 5–7 frustrate the twentieth-century theological scholar because of the strong resistance that Augustine displays there against any sort of change or history in God.

Traditionally, this resistance against change in God has been seen as a residue of the Platonic tradition. All things changeable are subject to corruption, and therefore, they distract from true being, which is eternal, immaterial, spiritual and beyond change. According to this thesis, the idea of a changeless God in Christianity is the consequence of the hellenization of Christianity. This connection between Augustine's antipathy towards change and the Platonic tradition is not completely false, but it might well be at best half of the story. In fact, Augustine's antipathy towards change is much more the product of his own theology than of the Platonic tradition. This can be elucidated from a number of different angles.

First, it can be elucidated in terms of the dysfunctionalization of the Trinity that takes place in Augustine's theology. In the Platonic tradition, especially in its Plotinian form, the One is beyond change. However, as we have argued in the previous chapter, the One is not only completely transcendent from the world and beyond change, but as the Absolute opposite to which nothing exists, it is also the ultimate principle of everything that appears in the world. From the perspective of the latter aspect of the One as the Absolute, one might say that history and change are the mode in which the One appears to us in the world. The One appears in a changing world, although it is not this change itself, but the stable principle that grounds it.

A further step would then be to consider the monistic nature of the Platonic tradition. Given that the One is the ultimate and single principle behind and in everything that is, change and history must have their place *in* the One and be caused by the One. There is a strong participatory relationship between the One and the world. From this perspective, change and history are less negative in a Platonic philosophy than it might seem. This is also the case when we consider the popularity of an *exitus–reditus* scheme in Platonism incorporating change and becoming in metaphysics.

This is all the more so when a Platonic metaphysics becomes reformulated in terms of a Christian doctrine of the Trinity, not Augustine's type of Trinitarianism, but a functionalizing one. The appearance of the world as the appearance of the One in multiplicity and materiality is now very positively formulated as the appearance of the Father in the Son recognized in the Holy Spirit. Within this functionalizing frame of reference, one can no longer simply say that the One is appearing in something that is worse than it, because embedded in matter. Rather, one is forced to formulate the relationship

between that which is changeless (the One) and that which appears and becomes changeable, as something positive, as a relationship between a Father and a Son.

The more 'orthodox' the version of the doctrine of the Trinity is that is proposed, the more positive one's view of change and history will be. The higher the status given to the Son is, and the closer the Son is construed to the Father, the closer human history is linked to the ultimate principle, the Father. The Father cannot be without the Son, nor without the Holy Spirit, and therefore, the *reditus* into God cannot simply be a return to the changeless Father, but must be a communion with God the Father through the Son and in the Holy Spirit. As we have seen in the previous chapter, it is not without reason that Hegel drew his inspiration for his historicized metaphysics from the Church fathers.

As we have seen in this chapter, however, Augustine rejects the metaphysical functionalization of the Trinity because he sees it as a residue of a subordinationist theology. Father, Son and Spirit, as far as they are in themselves, are all completely beyond change and history and share in the same aseity. As a consequence, his Trinitarian doctrine does not at all alleviate the contradistinction of change in history, on the one hand, and the strict immutability of all the three persons in the Trinity, on the other. Augustine's doctrine of the Trinity reinforces the gap between God and the world, rather than providing a model for their description within one ontological structure.

One may approach the question of change and history in God from another angle, that of the relationship between time and eternity. One easily recalls Augustine's essays about time in the *Confessiones* and elsewhere. These reflections in fact flow from a similar break between the One and the world that we see at the level of the dysfunctionalization of the Trinity. The 'emanation' of everything from the One in a Plotinian metaphysics is, contrary to common Christianized misreading, not a temporal process but an ontological hierarchy. To put it bluntly, the 'emanation' of everything from the One is a description of the way in which all things in the world relate to their ultimate grounding principle, but this description is, so to speak, timelessly true of every moment in the 'history' of the universe, a universe that is eternal.

In fact, in a Plotinian metaphysics, it is very hard to think of time and eternity the way Augustine is able to do, and this is so because Augustine has a real ontological gap between God and creation, so that creation has a beginning that Plotinus' world cannot have. It makes no sense to think of it in terms of a moment in which the One existed, but nothing else, and then a moment came in which the One 'created' a world outside of itself, which could then eventually 'return' to its origin in the One. Everything exists in the One all the time. Thus, the opposition between God who exists eternally and immutably, on the one hand, and the world that exists in a different ontological order, namely, a temporal one, is impossible in a Platonic philosophy

and the result of Augustine's doctrine of creation. 'History', as a succession of ontologically unique moments, is a Christian innovation.

This leads to a paradox concerning the twentieth-century critical evaluation of Augustine's Trinity as completely changeless. On the one hand, Augustine's account of change and time is much more radical than what is possible in a Platonic metaphysics. Therefore, history counts more in Augustine than in Plotinus. This is part of the rationale behind the *Confessiones*, of course the one behind the *De civitate Dei* as a world history, and behind the idea of the missions of the Trinitarian persons in *De Trinitate*. If the world is really something other than God, history can be a real history of sequences of moments that have unique particular characteristics. On the other hand, however, God, who is thought as being beyond time, becomes completely changeless and this raises the question of how this God can be really involved in a history that is more real than ever.

We have seen this paradox in our discussion of a Hegelian account of the incarnation in the previous chapter. On the one hand, no metaphysics is more historical than Hegel's. One might even see his metaphysics as a return to the Platonic holistic and monolithic metaphysics and as an explicit critique of Augustine's split between God and the world. It is no coincidence that Augustine is reticent to use the term 'infinite' for God, and that Hegel criticized a God beyond the world as a 'bad infinite'. On the other hand, as we have seen from Halfwassen and Wendte, Hegel's account of the incarnation has difficulties accounting for the uniqueness of the incarnation in a particular historical person, because every moment in the history of the world is a moment in the history of the Absolute, and no moment can be more unique than any other.

Hence, the relationship between God and the world and the possibility of God's actions in the world become a pressing issue in Augustine's theology. The characteristics of this relationship come particularly to the fore in the relationship between what we might anachronistically call the relationship between the 'immanent' and the 'economic' Trinity. It is somehow anachronistic, but, as we have seen, Augustine is perhaps still more or less the inventor of a strong distinction between the way the Trinitarian persons relate to one another, on the one hand, and the way the Trinity relates to the world, on the other.

As I have already argued, this leads to a strong dysfunctionalization of the Trinity. The paradox appears here again, though. A strong functionalization of the Trinity in terms of a Trinitarian metaphysics could be said to make the most of the doctrine of the Trinity in that everything that is said is somehow related to the doctrine of the Trinity. On the other hand, however, this Trinitarian functionalization of everything is a mere redescription of the structure of ontology, and, as such, one might easily do without it. In addition, elaborating on the discussion of time and eternity, it is basically atemporal, even when it is a Trinitarian redescription of a profoundly historical metaphysics

like a Hegelian one. This is so because the Trinitarian redescription is related to the ontological constitution of this historicized metaphysics, but not with specific moments in the history that is implied by it.

There, the paradox comes in. Augustine rejects almost every functionalization of the Trinity. The distinct Trinitarian persons, however, are related to very particular and, therefore, contingent events in history, linking Trinitarian doctrine very specifically and particularly to the history of the world and salvation. Ontologically, such links are arbitrary. Ontologically, the Son as the second person of the Trinity is arbitrarily linked to the human person Mary. This is so because if the Son is interpreted in a functionalized way, following a Platonic or Hegelian ontology, the link to Mary is merely an illustration of the way in which the concept of 'Son' is the principle of the appearance of the Father in everything. Hence, the Son could equally have been linked to Jane in 1991 bce, and in fact, he is, and this link to Jane is of exactly the same ontological type as the one to Mary!

This is different in Augustine's dysfunctionalized doctrine of the Trinity. We speak about the Son not as the principle of the appearance of the Father in the world, but as the 'person' in God who became a human being in Jesus Christ, the concrete historical person living in Israel whose mother was Mary. The 'who', and 'where' of our speaking of the Son are intrinsically connected to the way in which we come to know and speak about the second person of the Trinity, even when, ontologically, the second person of the Trinity is not at all determined by this moment in the history of the world.

This is all the more so when we make the relationship between the 'immanent' and the 'economic' Trinity clearer, or, perhaps more precisely, when we shed more light on its mysterious character. Why are there three 'persons' in the Trinity? In Augustine's theology, this becomes a question that is hard to answer because the Trinity, as it is in itself, is not aligned to a metaphysics. Basically, the answer must be: because Scripture teaches it. The Son speaks to the Father as someone who is of equal divinity but still as someone distinct from him. Also, the Son speaks of the coming of the Spirit, sent by the Father and, therefore, as someone who is distinct from the Father and the Son, and so on. This turns the Trinity that God is into a God with a very concrete 'face'. There is no underlying reason why God is the way that God is. This is also the underlying rationale behind speaking of God as *Trinitas quae est Deus* rather than Aquinas' *Deus trinus*. In this expression, *Trinitas* plays the role of a proper name rather than as a functional description, much the same way as God is called by that name in Ambrose's famous *O lux beata Trinitas*.

On the one hand, this makes for the radical otherness of God as Trinity, as I will argue more extensively when dealing with Augustine's negative theology. On the other hand, it makes for a very concrete and a very historical revelation of the Trinity to human beings. This Trinity, insofar as it is considered in itself, is completely beyond history, but precisely for this reason, it

appears in our human history *in* this history, and not *as* this history. Once it would appear *as* this history, it would remain invisible, because it would be mediated and revealed by everything rather than through specific events and actions. Given that it appears in this history, it appears through the specific actions of the Trinitarian persons who work together indivisibly on the one hand, but through specific appropriations on the other. Thus, creation is specifically appropriated to the Father, although also in the work of creation, all three divine persons act indivisibly. In the work of redemption, the Son becomes human in Jesus Christ and suffers on the cross, dying for the sins of the world. The Spirit specifically appears in human history as the renewer of our hearts through faith in Christ, renewing the bond of love between God and us, between human beings, and renewing our own hearts to love ourselves as we ought. But still, it is one Trinity who works indivisibly.

This way of construing the relationship between the Trinity and the history of the world is basically consonant with Augustine's own argument in book 7, where he argues that the Trinitarian persons can only be relative to one another when they are also something in themselves. A relation is only truly a relation if it is a relationship between two things that are also something in themselves. This argument can also be applied to the relationship between the Trinity and the world. If the Trinity *is* the functional redescription of the relation between God and the world, the identity of both God and the world is swallowed up and God and world become one internally differentiated whole. This turns the history of the world into the flip side of the eternity of God. This makes God radically historical, but it does away with a true interaction between God and the world that is more than just the ontological fact of the unfolding of the Absolute. In Augustine, both the Trinity and the world receive a distinct ontological status, in which God is beyond history, but, precisely for this reason, able to relate to the world in a concrete and historical way.

2.7. A Specific Kind of Negative Theology

Apart from the question of change and historicity in God, there is another major issue that needs to be addressed from a systematic-theological perspective, namely, the question of the consistency of Augustine's doctrine of the Trinity. The question of its consistency has been posed repeatedly in the older literature, but, as we have seen in section 2.5, it returns in recent research. If it is not true that Augustine introduces a fourth God, namely, the essence behind the persons, how then does he construe the relationship between the essence and the persons, or does he not construe it at all, and ends up with a 'mystification' of the Trinity?

Although I seek to rehabilitate Augustine's Trinitarian theology for today, I agree with those who argue that Augustine's doctrine of the Trinity is inconsistent because it shows a tension between the oneness of God as the

single divine essence, and the threeness of God as the three 'somethings'. That which the three persons have in common, which is what they are *ad se*, is a numerically single essence, which turns the *ad se* essence as that which is related into a numerically single 'entity'. Therefore, what is said *ad aliquid* refers to the same thing that is related, which turns all the *ad aliquid* expressions into self-relations and, thus, bereaves them from their reciprocity.

Does Augustine know and acknowledge this? I think he does, although he does not turn it into an explicit feature of his view of the Trinity. It contributes, however, to various aspects of his view of what we would call the 'irrationality' of Augustine's doctrine of the Trinity. If Augustine's doctrine of the Trinity is inconsistent, one might say that it is meaningless, because it is not clear how the threeness of God is related to the oneness of God, and, thus, one of them needs to be given up. In the first case, modalism or so-called Sabellianism follows, whereas in the second case, tritheism follows.

Augustine hints at his awareness of the tension in his Trinitarian doctrine in various respects. One hint is the fact that sometimes he formulates his view of the Trinity as a balance between a Scylla and Charybdis, for example, in sermo 229G:

> There you have the Catholic faith, navigating as it were between Scylla and Charybdis, as one has to navigate in those straits between Sicily and Italy; on one side ship-wrecking rocks, on the other a ship-swallowing whirlpool. If it runs on the rocks, it's wrecked; if it's drawn into the whirlpool, it's swallowed up. So too with Sabellius: 'He's one,' he says; 'they aren't two, the Father and the Son.' Watch the ship being wrecked. Then the Arian: 'They are two, one greater, the other less, not of equal substance.' Watch the whirlpool at work. Navigate between the two of them, and keep a straight course. It's not without reason, you see, that Catholics are called orthodox; orthodoxon in Greek is 'straight' in English. (*sermo* 229G, *PLS* 2, 566)

Posing a Scylla and Charybdis problem does not mean that one has a positive understanding of why it is that one cannot coherently say how the oneness and threeness in God are related. It merely indicates that the author tries to live with a problem that he cannot solve. Augustine knows what he wants to avoid, but does he know why, and what does it mean positively that the Trinity is ineffable?

One way of making sense of Augustine's negative theology in a positive way is to point to the unicity of God. God does not belong to the created order, and, therefore, the Trinity cannot be aligned to creaturely categories such as belonging to a kind. As the Trinity is no kind that can be subtracted from its concrete existence, the 'what' question does not make sense in the case of the Trinity, because 'what' is always asked in the context of 'what it

is like'. God is *ego sum qui sum* in the sense of an absolute uniqueness, not in the sense of being one among others.

This has important consequences for the type of negative theology that Augustine develops. Augustine's negative theology is at once more and less negative than Plotinus' (and perhaps Denys'). It is less negative because the incomprehensibility, ineffability and uniqueness of God do not imply God's unknowability. The unknowability of God is something that Augustine does not have any interest in. At the end of book 8, when he discusses the role of faith in reawakening the knowledge and love of God, he clearly says: 'Faith therefore is a great help for knowing and loving God, not as though he were altogether unknown or altogether not loved without it, but for knowing him all the more clearly and loving him all the more firmly' (8.13). God is a God who reveals Godself, linking up with the image of God as the capability of loving and knowing God implanted in creation. This link, however, maintains the otherness of God. In this regard, true knowledge of God is no different from true knowledge of creaturely things because, as Augustine will explain in books 8–11, true knowledge knows things in their distinct otherness rather than from their identity with everything else in the One. True knowledge respects the otherness of the other. This knowledge, however, because it is irreproducible (because ineffable), is irreducibly concrete. God is God as God reveals Godself. God cannot be reproduced in a doctrine or any other discourse. This is also the rationale behind what we will see in book 8, where Augustine breaks down the concept of truth by identifying God and truth. Because we cannot see God as sinful human beings, he even goes as far as saying: *noli quaerere quid sit veritas*: don't try to know what truth is. God is knowable but only as Godself, and, then, after sin, only to a very limited extent, for which reason we need faith to regain our access to the Truth that God is.[42]

But still, this remark about Augustine's concept of truth as a Person already introduces the other side of the coin: Augustine's negative theology is also more negative than Plotinus'. We can elucidate this when we finally formulate Augustine's negative theology in terms of his own concept: simplicity. The idea of the Trinity as known concretely, in revelation, was helpful, and it is indeed part of the logic of Augustine's argument in books 5–7, but it is not Augustine's own conceptuality. In fact, I have made Augustine slightly fashionable by phrasing his negative theology in terms of a Kripkean theory of proper names. There is nothing wrong with doing this, as long as we remain reasonably close to Augustine's argument and we realize that we rephrase his argument using our philosophical frame of reference rather than his.

[42] For an attempt to make sense of the idea of truth as a Person, see Maarten Wisse, 'Truth as a Person, Theology as Crisis Management: By Way of Conclusion', in Lamberigts et al., *Orthodoxy, Process and Product* (Leuven: Peeters, 2009), 399–410.

His was the language of simplicity dominated by the distinction between speaking about the material, created and mutable order, and the immaterial, immutable order. All of our language, Augustine argues, works through division. We take an object and we assign a predicate to it, as if the predicate is accidental to it. Such cannot be the case with the Trinity who is God, and, therefore, our language falls short of speaking adequately about God. It is not only language that falls short, however. Thought does so as well, and this is partly caused by sin. Through the effects of sin – books 8–11 will explain how this works anthropologically – we become so occupied with material categories that we forget how to think something which is absolutely simple.

But if there were no sin, thought would still fall short, and language even more, because Augustine pushes the language of simplicity to such a degree that it almost stops making sense. We see this when we recall the passage at the end of book 6, where Augustine meshes up language until it ends in prayer:

> Those three seem both to be bounded or determined by each other, and yet in themselves to be unbounded or infinite. But in bodily things down here one is not as much as three are together, and two things are something more than one thing; while in the supreme Trinity one is as much as three are together, and two are not more than one, and in themselves they are infinite. So they are each in each and all in each, and each in all and all in all, and all are one. Whoever sees this even *in part*, or *in a puzzling manner in a mirror* (1 Cor 13:12), should rejoice at knowing God, and should *honor and thank him as God* (Rom 1:21); whoever does not see it should proceed in godliness toward seeing it, not in blindness toward making objections to it. For God is one, and yet he is three. On the one hand the persons are not to be taken as muddled together in the text *From whom are all things, through whom are all things, for whom are all things*; and on the other, *not to many Gods, but to him be glory for ever and ever. Amen* (Rom 11:36). (6.12)

If we compare this quotation to Plotinus, we see why it is precisely the revelation of this Trinity that makes Augustine's theology more negative than Plotinus'. In Plotinus too, the category of number is not applicable to the One. The term 'one' is used because something absolutely simple is denoted, but not because a 'one' is intended that is in any sense related to a 'two' or a 'zero'. Quite the contrary. The One is the Absolute and, therefore, it has nothing opposite to it. Likewise, the One is ineffable, is beyond contradiction and incomprehensible. Nothing would be more tempting for Augustine, given his strong interest in divine simplicity, than the adoption of a Plotinian concept of the One.

But this is not what Augustine does. Although ineffable, beyond thought, beyond number and even unknowable as the One itself, Plotinus' One is still rationally related to thought, speech, knowledge and number, because it is

its condition of possibility, its ground. As that which appears in speech, number and thought, everything that is, it is rooted in it, and what flows from it, is a rational dialectics of Being. Augustine's Trinity, however, leaves its traces in the created order as a certain unity, form and order, but it reveals itself as a hard contradiction between a single essence and three 'somethings'. This breaks the rules of simplicity because in a hard version of an absolutely simple being, one can no longer maintain the threeness of that being without violating its simplicity.

Thus, the rational because the dialectical relationship between God and the world is broken. There is no underlying principle that relates God and the world enabling us to know how to speak of God in our own creaturely language. God appears in the world as a mystery that one can pray to and praise, but no more than that.

The price to be paid for this concept of Trinity or God is high. Augustine's God is the Trinity of which one can only say that it is not indiscriminately one, and still not three in any accepted common sense. The Trinity in Augustine is like an island of irrationality within the realm of doctrinal reflection. The boundaries of the island are known, no indiscriminate oneness, no many gods, but what is inside these boundaries is a concrete otherness that cannot be scrutinized by thought. Theology stops here and prayer begins.

What I especially like about this aspect of Augustine's theology is that it combines rationality with irrationality in such a way that the realm of irrationality within his theology remains limited and even determines the rational parts of his theology without overthrowing them. We will see this in subsequent chapters on Christology and anthropology. In Augustine's anthropology, for example, the mystery of the Trinity becomes one of the poles in a trinity between lover, beloved and love. Because this Trinitarian anthropology is rooted in a concept of God that remains a mystery and thus irreducible to either the lover or the beloved, there is no dialectical relationship between the lover and the beloved that leads to a reduction of the beloved into a copy of the lover. This Trinitarian anthropology remains rational and aims to elucidate the way human beings are, even to be comprehended by those who do not accept the Christian faith, but it is based on the radical concrete otherness that characterizes Augustine's doctrine of the Trinity.

Thus, Augustine succeeds in retaining a radical otherness and negative theology concerning the doctrine of the Trinity and, as we will see, also Christology, without turning the whole of Christian theology into a contradictory reflection. There is a marking difference here between the radical dialectical method of the early Karl Barth, for example, for whom the whole of Christian theology has a Christological structure that consists of a 'yes' and a 'no' that both circle around a 'centre' (*Mitte*), a centre which is unknown. In Barth's early dialectical theology, the impossibility of speaking

about God turns the whole of Christian theology into an impossible enterprise.[43]

2.8. Joseph Ratzinger's Reception of Augustine

In order to show the potential of Augustine's doctrine of the Trinity for systematic theology, we make the turn to contemporary theology again. This turn will fulfil three purposes. First, I want to show how Augustine's doctrine of the Trinity has been received in contemporary theology and how this contemporary reception was decisively influenced by the contemporary theological context. In this section, we will focus on Joseph Ratzinger's reception of Augustine's doctrine of the Trinity. My thesis will be that Ratzinger restyles Augustine's doctrine of the Trinity into a forerunner of the twentieth-century Trinitarian renaissance and post-Hegelian relational thinking.

Second, precisely because Ratzinger interprets Augustine's theology in the direction of contemporary Trinitarian theology, a discussion of Ratzinger's theology enables a more extensive comparison between Augustine's doctrine of the Trinity on the one hand, and the contemporary Trinitarian framework on the other. I will argue that Ratzinger's modern Trinitarian framework raises as many problems as it solves. The key problem in Ratzinger's modern framework is that God becomes dependent on the world and its history on the one hand, but is claimed to remain independent on the other.

Finally, the discussion of Ratzinger will act like a bridge between the discussions of the doctrine of the Trinity proper, dealt with in the current chapter, and Christology, the subject of the next chapter. Speaking about the Trinity, for Ratzinger, is speaking about the relationship between God and Jesus, so that a discussion of his Trinitarian theology moves us inevitably into his Christology as well.

2.8.1. The Notion of Person in Theology

A good example of the way in which Ratzinger links up a modern personalist and relational theology and his Augustinian inspiration can be found in an article taken up into the 1977 collection of essays titled *Dogma und Verkündigung*.[44] It was subsequently republished in the international journal *Communio* in 1990.[45] *Communio* had paid attention to it earlier, in 1986,

[43] Karl Barth, 'Das Wort Gottes als Aufgabe der Theologie (1922)', in Holger Finze, editor, *Karl Barth Gesamtausgabe. 3. Vorträge und kleinere Arbeiten* (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1990), 144–175.

[44] Joseph Ratzinger, *Dogma und Verkündigung* (3rd edition; München: Wewel, 1977), 201–219.

[45] Joseph Ratzinger, 'Retrieving the Tradition: Concerning the Notion of Person in Theology', *Communio* 17 (1990), 439–454.

when Hans Urs von Balthasar responded to the German version.[46] The title of the *Communio* version is already telling. In the German version, the title is 'Zum Personverständnis in der Theologie'. In English, the title is rather 'Retrieving the Tradition: Concerning the Notion of Person in Theology'.

In this article, Ratzinger characterizes the concept of the person as a Christian innovation, derived from both the discussion surrounding the concept of God and the nature of Christ during the first four centuries of the Christian era. In the first subsection of the essay, Ratzinger introduces Tertullian's discovery of the concept of 'person' already in strikingly relational terms. In the second subsection, Ratzinger discusses the relationality of the concept of God in terms of Augustine's concept of relation in book 5 of *De Trinitate*:

> About two hundred years later [after Tertullian, MW], at the turn of the fifth century, Christian theology reached the point of being able to express in articulated concepts what is meant by the thesis: God is a being in three persons. In this context, theologians argued, person must be understood as *relation*. According to Augustine and late patristic theology, the three persons that exist in God are in their nature relations. They are, therefore, not substances that stand next to each other, but they are real existing relations, and nothing besides. I believe this idea of the late patristic period is very important. In God, person means relation. Relation, being related, is not something superadded to the person, but it *is* the person itself. In its nature, the person exists only *as* relation.[47]

A key notion in Ratzinger's theology appears already here, when Ratzinger explains the relationality within the Trinity as the relationship of *prayer* between God the Father and Christ as the Son, which Ratzinger derives especially from the Gospel of John. We will come back to this specific interpretation of the relationality within the Trinity as the Johannine *prayer* between the Father and Christ below.

So far, Ratzinger has depicted the concept of relationality as something that is characteristic of God, though shortly before the end of the subsection, he begins to make the transition to the application of it on the level of anthropology and soteriology:

> I believe a profound illumination of God as well as man occurs here, the decisive illumination of what person must mean in terms of Scripture: *not* a substance that closes itself in itself, but the phenomenon of complete relativity, which is, of course, realized in its entirety only in the one who is God, but which indicates the direction of all personal being. The point is thus reached here at which – as we shall see below

[46] Hans Urs von Balthasar, 'On the Concept of Person', *Communio* 13 (1986), 18–26.
[47] Ratzinger, 'Notion of Person', 444.

> – there is a transition from the doctrine of God into Christology and into anthropology.[48]

On the one hand, Ratzinger construes this transition from theology to anthropology as something that originates in Augustine. On the other hand, however, he is well aware of pushing Augustine here beyond his limits because immediately after having introduced the transition, he sharply criticizes Augustine's way of moving from theology to anthropology:

> As already indicated, Augustine explicitly transposed this theological affirmation into anthropology by attempting to understand the human person as an image of the Trinity in terms of this idea of God. Unfortunately, however, he committed a decisive mistake here to which we will come back later. In his interpretation, he projected the divine persons into the interior life of the human person and affirmed that intra-psychic processes correspond to these persons. The person as a whole, by contrast, corresponds to the divine substance. As a result, the trinitarian concept of person was no longer transferred to the human person in all its immediate impact. However, at present we can merely hint at this point; it will become clearer below.[49]

Indeed the similarity of the relationality in God, in Christ and in human beings becomes clearer in what follows. At this point, Ratzinger pursues a similar strategy here in the doctrine of the Trinity, Christology and anthropology. On the one hand, he affirms that the concept of person is developed in the early Church in the context of the development of a Christology, like he held that the concept of relation originates in the Christian doctrine of the Trinity. On the other hand, he claims that the development of the concept of person in the Early Church was strongly hindered by the prevailing Greek substantialist philosophy, thereby preparing for a reinterpretation of the tradition in relational terms.

In the context of Christology, Ratzinger starts from the Chalcedonian consensus:

> Theology answered the riddle, 'Who and what is this Christ?' by means of the formula, 'He has two natures and one person, a divine and a human nature, but only a divine person.' Here again the word *persona* is introduced. One must say that this statement suffered from tremendous misunderstandings in Western thought.[50]

[48] Ratzinger, 'Notion of Person', 447.
[49] Ratzinger, 'Notion of Person', 447.
[50] Ratzinger, 'Notion of Person', 447.

The first misunderstanding is, from Ratzinger's point of view, the idea that the one divine person of Christ leads to a defective human nature. Ratzinger reviews a number of heretical efforts to solve the riddle of the one person in two natures and finishes it with the following statement bringing down these problems to the Greek substantialist heritage:

> I believe that if one follows this struggle in which human reality had to be brought in, as it were, and affirmed for Jesus, one sees what tremendous effort and intellectual transformation lay behind the working out of this concept of person, which was quite foreign in its inner disposition to the Greek and the Latin mind. [After the introduction of Boethius' concept of person] One sees that the concept of person stands entirely on the level of substance. This cannot clarify anything about the Trinity or Christology; it is an affirmation that remains on the level of the Greek mind which thinks in substantialist terms.[51]

As we heard earlier, Christology, like the doctrine of the Trinity and of anthropology, should all be thought through from a relational frame of reference, as is now clear from the second misunderstanding: 'The second great misunderstanding is to see Christ as the simply unique ontological exception which must be treated as such.'[52] In terms of references to Teilhard de Chardin and the notion of Christ as the second Adam, Ratzinger defends the idea of Christ as an exception as being a proof of a failing Greek ontological scheme that had to be replaced by a relational notion of the person and the world in general. Subsequently, he comes back to the question of Christology:

> After these two fundamental misunderstandings have been rejected, the question remains, What does the formula mean positively, 'Christ has two natures in one person?' I must admit right away that a theological response has not yet completely matured. In the great struggles of the first six centuries, theology worked out what the person is not [*sic*], but it did not clarify with the same definiteness what the word means positively. For this reason I can only provide some hints that point out the direction in which reflection should probably continue.[53]

Three, although Ratzinger announces only two, aspects of the notion of person are now introduced:

> a) It is the nature of spirit to put itself in relation, the capacity to see itself and the other. . . . [R]elatedness to the whole, lies in the essence of the spirit. And precisely in this, namely, that it not only *is*, but reaches

[51] Ratzinger, 'Notion of Person', 448.
[52] Ratzinger, 'Notion of Person', 449.
[53] Ratzinger, 'Notion of Person', 450.

> beyond itself, it comes to itself. In transcending itself it *has* itself; by being with the other it first becomes itself, it comes to itself.[54]

The reader might have noticed the sudden introduction of the notion of 'spirit' (*Geist*). Strikingly, at first, it is not completely clear which sort of spirit Ratzinger means exactly. In fact, what he provides is an exact description of a Hegelian dialectics of the absolute Spirit, in which the spirit comes to itself through a process of self-alienation and reintegration. A few lines later, however, it becomes clear that he in fact means the human person, because he now enhances his Hegelian dialectics with a more fundamental relationship between the human 'spirit' and God:

> We must go one step further. The spirit is that being which is able to think about, not only itself and being in general, but the wholly other, the transcendent God. This is perhaps the mark that truly distinguishes the human spirit from other forms of consciousness found in animals, namely, that the human spirit can reflect on the wholly other, the concept of God. We may accordingly say: the other through which the spirit comes to itself is finally that wholly other for which we use the stammering word 'God.'[55]

Here, Ratzinger reformulates the Hegelian absolute spirit in terms of Augustine's notion of the human person as coming to itself only if it submits itself to God by loving God above all and its neighbour as oneself, a notion of the human person that also fits well in a post-Barthian relational view of the human person, in which Christ as the person who is constituted by an inner unity in difference between the divine person and the human nature of Christ, determines the character of human beings.

Ratzinger comes back to the Christological determination of the human person when he discusses the second aspect of the notion of person. He admits that the formula 'one person in two natures' is problematic and accidental:

> But the decisive thing that emerges from it for the concept of the person and for the understanding of human beings is, in my judgment, still completely clear. In Christ, in the man who is completely with God, human existence is not cancelled, but comes to its highest possibility, which consists in transcending itself into the absolute and in the integration of its own relativity into the absoluteness of divine love.[56]

Notice how Ratzinger formulates the 'divine nature' of Christ. Ratzinger recognizes the traditional requirements of Christology as the *vere deus* and

[54] Ratzinger, 'Notion of Person', 451.
[55] Ratzinger, 'Notion of Person', 451.
[56] Ratzinger, 'Notion of Person', 452.

the *vere homo*, but he construes a two-nature Christology as an interpretation of these requirements that is rooted in a flawed Greek ontology and subsequently reinterprets these requirements from a relational frame of reference. He speaks, here and elsewhere, about Christ as 'God', but explains this in terms of the dialogical relationship between the Father as God and Jesus as the Son. In that sense, he implicitly and almost explicitly rejects the Chalcedonian, and to a smaller extent, Nicene consensus. Christ is one with the Father not in the sense of being of the same nature – this would presuppose a substance ontology that Ratzinger rejects – but Christ is 'the man who is completely with God'.

In this respect, Ratzinger's Christology comes very close to that of Protestant post-Barthian theologians such as Wolfhart Pannenberg and Ingolf Dalferth. The difference is that Ingolf Dalferth, for example, explicitly rejects the Chalcedonian creed,[57] whereas Ratzinger pays lip-service to it, but implicitly rejects it. In his *Der Gott Jesu Christi: Betrachtungen über den Dreieinigen Gott* – the title is already telling! – when discussing the transfiguration story in Luke, he defends this way of dealing with the Chalcedonian creed as follows, drawing again on the prayer of Jesus as the key to the understanding of the relationship between the Father and the Son:

> From this point of view, one might say that Luke turned Jesus' praying into the central Christological category, from which perspective he describes the mystery of the Son. What Chalcedon described with a formula from the realm of Greek ontology, Luke expresses in a totally personal category, spoken from the perspective of the historical experience of the earthly Jesus. Materially, however, there is a full correspondence with the formula of Chalcedon.[58]

2.8.2. Relationality and God's Independence from the World in *Introduction to Christianity*

So far, we have seen that Ratzinger reinterprets Augustine's doctrine of the Trinity in relational terms, stressing the importance of the concept of relation at the cost of the concept of substance. More broadly, this interpretation of Augustine goes along with a critique of Greek substance-ontological

[57] Ingolf U. Dalferth, 'Gott für uns. Die Bedeutung des christologischen Dogmas für die christliche Theologie', in Ingolf U. Dalferth, Johannes Fischer and Hans-Peter Großhans, editors, *Denkwürdiges Geheimnis. Beiträge zur Gotteslehre. Festschrift für Eberhard Jüngel zum 70. Geburtstag* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), 51–75.

[58] Joseph Ratzinger, *Der Gott Jesu Christi. Betrachtungen über den dreieinigen Gott* (München: Kösel-Verlag, 1976), 67, my translation. For a parallel passage, see Joseph Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity* (trans. Michael J. Miller; 2nd edition; San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993), 227; Joseph Ratzinger, *Einführung in das Christentum* (München: Kösel, 1968), 183.

thought. Instead, Ratzinger suggests that a modern relational and personal frame of reference does more justice to the biblical way of speaking about the relationships between and the unity of the persons in the Trinity. The relationship of prayer between God the Father and Jesus plays a key role in the interpretation of personhood and unity in the Trinity. In addition, both Christological and anthropological language is decisively transformed due to Ratzinger's rejection of Christ as an ontological exception.

As I have argued above, both when discussing Augustine and in drawing upon the systematic-theological implications of Augustine's strong distinction between an immanent and an economic Trinity, in this relational rethinking of the Trinity, a crucial change of the relationship between God and the world, eternity and history, is involved. This raises the question of the independence of God from history because if God is essentially God in relation to the historical person of Jesus, then God as Trinity becomes dependent on the existence of the world. Anthropologically, this raises the question of how, given that Christ is no ontological exception, humans are related to the divine and whether they are not themselves ultimately divine, or will become so.

In terms of Ratzinger's publications, especially his classic *Introduction to Christianity* highlights Ratzinger's awareness of these problems and his responses to them. In his discussion of the Trinity, Ratzinger introduces three fundamental attitudes that he sees as crucial to the development of the Christian doctrine of the Trinity:

> Three basic attitudes were decisive. The first could be described as faith in man's immediate proximity to God, the belief that the man who comes to deal with Christ meets in his fellow man Jesus, who as a fellow man is attainable and accessible to him, who is God himself, not some hybrid being intervening. The concern in the early Church about the true divinity of Jesus springs from the same root as the concern about his true humanity. Only if he was really a man like us can he be *our* mediator, and only if he is really God, like God, does the mediation reach its goal.

Concerning the question of the independence of God as Trinity from creation, this first attitude suggests that in Jesus, we meet God in a very direct way. As we will see in the next chapter, Augustine would deny this, because he would say that no one can meet God and live. Only the pure of heart will see God. Ratzinger seems of another opinion, and this implies at least that Jesus must be the Son of God in a way that is very close to or ideally, coincides, with his humanity.

At the same time, however, Ratzinger sketches a second basic attitude that emphasizes the otherness and oneness of God:

> Thus the second basic attitude has already been described by implication: the unyielding loyalty to a strictly monotheistic decision, to the confession, 'There is only *one* God.' Care had to be taken at all costs not

> to erect again, via the mediator, a whole region of middle beings and, with it, a region of false gods where man worships what is not God.

This stress on monotheism could, in terms of Ratzinger's own relational framework, mean two things: in one line of argument, the second person of the Trinity, Jesus Christ, must be the very same God as God the Father, thus requiring a very strong identification between Father and Son as both being God. Given that this second person of the Trinity is, in Ratzinger's theology, not only the second person in an 'immanent' Trinity, but the very historical person of Jesus, this would imply a strong dependence of God on the world, creation and history. In another line of argument, Ratzinger's monotheism is a reason to emphasize the otherness of God from humanity and the fact that Jesus obeys the Father as the one God. We will see below that Ratzinger needs both lines of argument, although they contradict one another.

The third basic attitude that Ratzinger mentions in his discussion of the Trinity in *Introduction to Christianity* is instructive as well because Ratzinger emphasizes that the involvement of the Trinity in history cannot be a mere show of a God who is not really involved in this history:

> The third basic attitude could be described as the effort to give the story of God's dealings with man its due and to take it seriously. This means that when God appears as Son, who says You' to the Father, it is not a play produced for man, not a masked ball on the state of human history, but the expression of reality. The idea of a divine show had been canvassed in the ancient Church by the Monarchians. The three Persons, they maintained, were three 'roles' in which God shows himself to us in the course of history.[59]

Although the precise consequences of this do not become completely clear, it is evident that the more real the involvement of God in human history is, the stronger the question will arise of whether the Trinity does not become part of this history in such a way as to become dependent on it.

It is exactly the dependence of God on humanity, however, that is one of the principal targets of Ratzinger, both in its intellectual and its political theological form. In the *Introduction to Christianity*, Ratzinger is explicitly criticizing Hegel and Schelling for what he sees as their speculative rethinking of the doctrine of the Trinity. It is exactly the dependence of God on human beings that is at stake in Ratzinger's criticism of Hegel, Schelling:

> The point of departure of this whole approach remains the idea that the doctrine of the Trinity is the expression of the historical side of

[59] Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, 165–166; Ratzinger, *Einführung in das Christentum*, 128–129.

> God and, therefore, of the way in which God appears in history. Inasmuch as Hegel and – in a different way – Schelling push this idea to its logical conclusion, they reach the point where they no longer distinguish this process of the historical self-revelation of God from a God quietly resting in himself behind it all; instead, they now understand the process of the history as the process of God himself. The historical form of God, then, is the gradual self-realization of the divine; thus, while history is the process of the *logos*, even the *logos* is only real as the process of history.[60]

Ratzinger links this up with Marx, who opts for our self-created future as being the real ultimate that we strive after, not an ultimate goal of the world that God intends, but one that we create. Thus, we see how Ratzinger's lifelong struggle with Marxism is intimately linked to his understanding of the Trinity and of Christology.

In spite of his sharp criticism of Hegel historicization of God, Ratzinger still borrows from Hegelianism in the sense that he defines the divinity of Jesus in terms of his Abba–Son relationship, in which 'divinity' does now not point to a divine 'nature', but consists of a 'divine' relationship, namely, a relationship that is defined by 'being for and from another':

> The Son as Son, and insofar as he is Son, does not proceed in any way from himself and so is completely one with the Father; since he is nothing beside him, claims no special position of his own, confronts the Father with nothing belonging only to him, makes no reservations for what is specifically his own, therefore he is completely equal to the Father. . . . To John, 'Son' means being from another; thus, with this word he defines the being of this man as being from another and for others, as a being that is completely open on both sides, knows no reserved area of the mere 'I'.[61]

We see here how Ratzinger attempts to uphold the monotheism of Christianity by claiming that the Son 'claims no special position of his own' and still, exactly in this way, is totally equal to the Father. To be God, it now turns out, is to be in relation, to be totally with another, with others, and the Son is God's exemplary and paradigmatic creation of God on earth, in the man Jesus. Jesus, in that respect, is identical to the Father, although different from him, in that what it means to be God for the Father would likewise mean to exist totally for others, at least that is what it would mean within

[60] Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, 169; Ratzinger, *Einführung in das Christentum*, 131.

[61] Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, 186; Ratzinger, *Einführung in das Christentum*, 146.

relational thought in general. Indeed this is what Ratzinger says about the Father, but he clearly makes a slip of his pen when he adds to this a concept of God that implies a substance ontology:

> 'Father' is purely a concept of relationship. Only in being for the other is he Father; in his own being in himself he is simply God. Person is the pure relation of being related, nothing else. Relationship is not something extra added to the person, as it is with us; it only exists at all as relatedness.[62]

As we will see below, this slip of the pen has everything to do with the intention to maintain a distinction between God and that which is not God, namely, the man Jesus, and the intention to maintain the independence of God from creation. This turns out to be difficult, however, given the definition of what it means to be divine for Jesus, and it is all the more difficult in the face of trying to maintain both the divinity and humanity of Jesus at the same time, without yet entering into a two-nature Christology. This becomes clear from the following statements in the discussion of Christology in the *Introduction*, where Ratzinger links up humanity and divinity as follows:

> The historical man Jesus is the Son of God, and the Son of God is the man Jesus. God comes to pass for man through men, nay, even more concretely, through *the* man in whom the quintessence of humanity appears and who for that very reason is at the same time God himself.[63]

Here we see clearly how Ratzinger follows Barth's rethinking of a two-nature Christology. Barth thought of the freedom of God in such a radical way that he asked: if God is really totally free in determining what and who he wants to be, why could God not choose to become man? Actually this is what God chose to do. So there is no stable 'divine' set of attributes over against a stable 'human' nature that in Christ come together – although in another sense, Barth's theology needs such a stable divine and human nature! – but God *geht in die Fremde*. *Der Herr wird Knecht*, God becomes what he is not, in order to make those who are not God participate in God as that which is not God (especially Barth's notion of the royal human being, *der königliche Mensch*).

This is the move that Ratzinger makes as well. Jesus is not an ordinary human being that was born like all of us, although on the other hand, he is. Jesus was with God and in terms of his ongoing *communio* with God the

[62] Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, 183; Ratzinger, *Einführung in das Christentum*, 144.

[63] Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, 194; Ratzinger, *Einführung in das Christentum*, 154.

Father, he can still more or less claim to be God. Although Ratzinger does not touch on this all that often, Jesus was really the 'Son' who was with God from all eternity who became a human being over against God. In the meantime Ratzinger makes an attempt to rethink Barth's all too 'modalist' tendency in the direction of a more Trinitarian and social model. This human being is then taken up in God again with the resurrection and ascension, being the first of all who believed in him. The result is a very elevation-oriented soteriology, where our purpose is really to become God, which occurs through the eucharist, when we become part of the body of Christ, Christ himself. Ultimately, this leads Ratzinger to a mutual identification of God and humanity, when he asks rhetorically:

> Or should the real man, precisely because he *is* wholly and properly such, be God, and God be the real man? Ought it to be possible for the most radical humanism and faith in the god who reveals himself to meet and even merge here?[64]

The big question, after reading this quote, is how to avoid Hegelianism and the interdependence of God and humanity. This is what we will now turn to in a systematic-theological reflection of Ratzinger's versus Augustine's thinking.

2.8.3. Ratzinger versus Augustine

In this last subsection, I will contrast Augustine with Ratzinger in order to highlight and address what I see as systematic-theological problems in Ratzinger's proposal for a Trinitarian theology. Thus, I aim to show the systematic potential of Augustine's doctrine of the Trinity over against Ratzinger's modern rethinking of it.

If we take a closer look at the aspects of Augustine's thought that resist the reading of his Trinitarian theology from the perspective of a relational ontology, we have to be honest and say that Augustine never knew of anything like this.[65] The idea of pure relationality was developed by the nineteenth-century philosopher Hegel and not by fifth-century Christian theologians. Augustine worked with a certain kind of substance-based ontology that he only modified when speaking about God and Christ, but not when speaking about human beings. It will be hard to defend this thesis fully in the context of this chapter. I will be able to discuss the differences between Ratzinger and Augustine only briefly.

[64] Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, 211; Ratzinger, *Einführung in das Christentum*, 169.

[65] Kany, *Augustins Trinitätsdenken,* 207–210, 498–499; Cf. Kurt Flasch, *Augustin: Einführung in sein Denken* (Stuttgart: Redam, 1980), 354–355.

Let me start with the question of God as Trinity. Ratzinger pushes Augustine's distinction between the essence of God – which is not the same as the substance of God – and the three persons of the Trinity too far by suggesting that the *nature* of God is the relation. This is not what Augustine says. Augustine says that the *nature* of God is God's essence, an essence that all three persons have in common. This essence is not a substance because it is not the substrate of a kind, of which then all three persons would be instances. It is a single essence. The *nature* of God is not the relation, but the essence, or both in an incomprehensible way. The key to a proper understanding of Augustine's doctrine of the Trinity is not an exclusive focus on the category of relation, but an adequate view of the interplay between the category of relation and the notion of essence.

One easily sees what the difference is when one asks what the one essence is within Ratzinger's view of the Trinity. In fact, for Ratzinger, the essence (in his terms, the 'nature') of the Trinity is the *relationship*, a relationship between two different persons rather than a single essence. What defines God as Trinity for Ratzinger is not the 'Godness' of Father, Son and Spirit, but the 'Godness' of the Father and the humanity of the Son (the Spirit is rather neglected in Ratzinger's theology). Hence, in terms of a substance-based ontology, or in terms of Augustine's notion of the essence of God – Augustine is *very* insistent on the difference between the essence and the relations – Ratzinger is a tritheist or a bitheist.

Apart from the question of whether Ratzinger is able to do justice to the thought of Augustine, the question is actually whether his own position is internally consistent. I would like to argue that it is not and that this problem circles around the question of how the divinity of Jesus can be maintained on the basis of Ratzinger's relational ontology. According to Ratzinger, Jesus is God in the sense of being completely with the other, with God, in seeking his identity solely from his Father rather than from an existence on his own.

This view entails a relational definition of what it is to be God. If being divine means this total identification with the other and kenosis of one's self in the other, this should also make up the divinity of the Father, unless the relational divinity of the Father would be something different from the relational divinity of the Son. This mutual kenosis between the Father and the Son as the radical implication of the relational meaning of the concept of God is also affirmed by Ratzinger when, as we have seen, he claims that the relational being of God and humanity is one and the same: here, radical humanism and a theology of revelation go together.

As we have seen, however, elsewhere in the *Introduction to Christianity*, Ratzinger makes a slip of his pen, speaking of the divinity of the Father as something non-relational, pointing to the Godness of God prior to his being Father. Ratzinger has various reasons for this, reasons that all have to do with claims that an orthodox Roman Catholic theologian has to uphold.

One of these claims is God's independence from the history of creation, or alternatively phrased, of avoiding the necessity of the world and the independence of God from creation. God cannot be lost into his relationality, he says against Hegel and Schelling, but needs a moment prior to his relation with the world. This is exactly what he claims in his 'slip of the pen', speaking of the divinity of the Father as something prior to his being in relation. Hence, the slip is less accidental than we suggested above. This way of speaking about the divinity of the Father, however, contradicts the relational definition of both Father and Son, and, therefore, implies a radical subordinationism in which, given the rejection of a two-nature Christology, the Son is the radical opposite of the Father, namely, not-God.

This second non-relational definition of what it means to be God also introduces a substance-ontological logic into the Trinitarian discourse. And indeed, this non-relational discourse continues to play a crucial role in Ratzinger's Christological discourse. At precisely the very heart of the relational discourse is the claim that Jesus exists wholly in his prayer to his Father, who is not only called his Father, but also God. Therefore, Jesus' relational divinity in fact consists in denying his own divinity, ascribing it only to his Father.[66] In this respect exactly, Jesus differs from the first Adam and his children, who claimed to be co-constitutive of the divine salvation that only God can bring about. In addition, the denial of being God himself on Jesus part is crucial for Ratzinger's theology because it belongs to his strict emphasis on the monotheistic nature of Christianity.

Summarizing, we can say that, on the one hand, Jesus has to be God and is claimed to be God along the lines of the relational definition of God. On the other hand, Jesus cannot be God and is claimed to deny his own divinity on the basis of a non-relational substance-based ontological definition of God. Either Ratzinger goes for the first option and he has to accept the historicization of God along the lines of Hegel, or he goes for the other option and Arianism follows.

Another internal problem arises from the implications of Ratzinger's Christology for the doctrine of the Trinity. What strikes me most in Ratzinger's Christology is his rejection of Jesus Christ as an ontological exception. Augustine is clearly in favour of Christ as an ontological exception and, I think, for good reasons. The problem is that, given our destiny to become fully ontologically equal to Jesus, namely, as human beings who are taken up into the divine community, the 'ontological' exception of the Trinity as triunity needs to be abandoned. Jesus is the first who is taken up into the Trinity, but if we are taken up, the Trinity as a communion of *three* divine

[66] Of course, one might argue that there is nothing inconsistent in not recognizing one's own divinity, but what is at stake here is more than this. Given the need for God's independence from the world *and* a strong version of monotheism, Jesus is not allowed to be ontologically divine.

persons is gone. The upshot is a divine community of us all because there is no difference between the Son and us.

Ratzinger would probably solve this along the lines of a body of Christ language, as one finds in De Lubac's *Catholicism*, and in such a way as to construe our participation in the life of the Trinity as a participation in the body of Christ rather than through a participation in the life of God on our own. First, I would say, this generates a new ontological language of exception, but second, it does away with the very intention of a relational ontology, namely, that we are what we are in a dialogical relationship. Taking us all up into one body does away with the individuality that is needed to be in communion with one another.

All in all, I wonder whether the relational framework that Ratzinger offers us as an improvement over the substance-based ontology of the tradition, solves more problems than it causes. An interesting question, for example, is whether Ratzinger's quite drastic reformulation of the Nicene, and especially the Chalcedonian consensus along relational lines, can do justice to the concerns of a traditional doctrine of the Trinity and a two-nature Christology. Of course, there is no space here to develop a full-scale analysis, but let me mention some points:

Basically, Ratzinger claims that we can do away with a two-nature Christology if we take Jesus' divine *origin* and *destiny* sufficiently into account. In between, however, we can take Jesus' humanity fully seriously, and for the time of his dwelling on earth, we should leave it at that.[67] The very worst thing that the new Adam could do is to claim to be divine. My first question would be whether the Gospels allow for such a strong emphasis on the humanity of Jesus before the resurrection, at the cost of the idea of a 'divine nature'. If Jesus says 'I am', can this be explained in terms of a perfect *relationship* to his Father? Similarly, if Jesus claims to be an independent source of *Torah*, or if Jesus identifies himself in Matthew implicitly with JHWH in the story of the cleansing of the temple? Does this fit into the idea of Jesus as the new Adam, a humble human being not affected by *superbia*? As David Brown remarks: '[I]t is impossible for someone who is truly human sanely to believe himself divine.'[68] Hence, either this person is not only human, but also divine, and thus in some sense able to sanely believe himself to be divine, or this person is insane.

I think this paves the way for a reappreciation of a two-nature Christology in terms of a logic on the exclusion of possibilities, a logic not so much prompted by a failing Greek substance-based ontology, but rather prompted by an attempt to think together the various aspects of the Christ event as wit-

[67] Cf. above, the quote from *Introduction to Christianity*: 'The historical man Jesus is the Son of God, and the Son of God is the man Jesus.'

[68] David Brown, *Tradition and Imagination: Revelation and Change* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 278.

nessed to in the Gospels and the New Testament as a whole. Such excluded options were, for example, the idea of a semi-God, various forms of idolatry and worshipping a *human being* as God, but it was also about retaining the God–human being distinction, as it was believed, at least in Augustine's case, that the desire to become God was not only wrong because we want to realize it on our own, but because it runs counter to our true nature.

Of course this does not solve the riddle that a two-nature Christology actually is. This leads me to my final point. Ratzinger repeatedly criticizes those who try to align Christianity completely to a pagan existing philosophical framework, Arius, for example. The Church corrected these tendencies, Ratzinger suggests.[69] In the doctrine of the Trinity, this leads Ratzinger to the claim that the doctrine is best seen as a form of negative theology.

What strikes me, however, is the extent to which Ratzinger aligns himself to a modern philosophical framework, namely, a post-Hegelian form of relational thinking, and seems to see this as a solution to the problems that resulted from the Church's modifications of the Greek philosophical framework. This *solves* a number of *philosophical* problems, but the question remains as to whether it does not do away with an insight that was crucial to the Church's enigmatic way of speaking about the Trinity and Christ, namely, the insight that if we *solve* the problems inherent in these subjects, we lose the mystery that is fundamental to them. While Ratzinger pays lip-service to the fact of Trinitarian theology as negative theology, he does not seem to take the implications of that claim seriously enough.

[69] Apart from the discussion in *Introduction to Christianity* mentioned above, see also Joseph Ratzinger, *Theologische Prinzipienlehre: Bausteine einer katholischen Fundamentaltheologie* (München: Wewel, 1982), 117–121.

3

CHRISTOLOGY

3.1. Introduction

In this chapter, we turn from the discussion of the Trinity proper to an analysis of the books from *De Trinitate* in which Augustine deals with Christological questions. As the third motto to the present work, I quoted the seventeenth-century Reformed theologian Francis Turretin. Turretin suggests that there are only two really serious riddles in systematic theology: Trinity and Christology.[1] In the previous chapter, we have seen how Augustine's discourse about the Trinity confirms Turretin's designation of the first problem. The present chapter will confirm Turretin's second designation. Different from Augustine's analysis in books 5–7, which dealt with the riddle of Trinitarian language in a very explicit way, we will see that Augustine's approaches the riddle of Christological language differently from that of Trinitarian language. Whereas in the books on the Trinity proper, he dealt with the problem with an emphasis on the incomprehensibility and ineffability of God, in the Christological books he deals with the complexity of Christological language through an emphasis of the soteriological significance of Christ, rather than through an explicit attempt to come to terms with a proper Christological language.

As we have seen in our discussion of Ratzinger already, a paradox comes to the fore. Whereas, as we will see below, Augustine deals with the riddle of Christological language through an emphasis on the soteriological significance of Christ, twentieth-century receptions of his work will focus very much on a reconstruction of the *being* of Christ, the way in which God and human nature are in play within the one person of Christ, and derive the soteriological significance of Christ from his 'mode of being' rather than from his acts. Among systematic theologians, this leads to attempts, as we have seen in Ratzinger, of developing a new Christological language that

[1] Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology* (ed. James T. Dennison, Jr; 3 volumes; trans. George Musgrave Giger; Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 1992), II, 13, vi.

allegedly avoids the riddle and functionalizes the being of Christ in soteriological terms. Historically, it means that scholars of Augustine have developed an enormous interest in those passages in Augustine where he deals with proper Christological language, and all the more in those passages where he seems to assign soteriological significance to the relationship between the two natures of Christ.

This is the reason why, in this chapter, I have decided to reverse the order of exposition, beginning my analysis with the analysis of the contemporary Christological scene, showing how present-day Christological discussions influence or even determine historical readings of Augustine's work, and presenting Augustine's argument only thereafter. I will call the contemporary Christological paradigm a Christology of manifestation, and present it in terms of a discussion of Radical Orthodoxy's Christology in section 3.2. Although I do by no means want to suggest that Radical Orthodoxy's Christology should be seen as completely representative of contemporary Christology, building on the argument developed in Chapter 1, I still think that it shows certain typical features that are representative of crucial developments in the Christology of the twentieth century. Subsequently, in section 3.3, I will deal with recent scholarship on Augustine's Christology, especially addressing the recent interest in what one might call a pan-Christological reading of Augustine. In sections 3.4 to 3.7, I will analyse Augustine's Christology in books 1, 4 and 13 of *De Trinitate*. Finally in the last section, I will come back to the comparison between the contemporary and Augustine's Christological paradigm.

3.2. Radical Orthodoxy's Christology of Manifestation

A good place to start when seeking to understand Radical Orthodoxy's Christology is Hegel's well-known distinction between a bad and a true infinity. The God of theism that is a mere first cause in a chain of secondary causes is a bad infinite, as it is the mere negation of the finite. As something over against the finite, a bad infinite is 'limited' by the finite and as such not really infinite. The idea of the bad infinite is central to Radical Orthodoxy's critique of contemporary culture and theology,[2] as it represents a thinking of the world as devoid of God – the famous nihilist world that Radical Orthodoxy speaks of. Instead, the true infinite must include the finite, so that nothing in the world can be thought apart from its relation to God as the true infinite. Thus, everything that is, is insofar as it exists in God.

To make matters still more complex, I will now come back to the history of Western metaphysics, addressed in Chapter 1. Radical Orthodoxy proposes

[2] For a general introduction to Radical Orthodoxy, see Tom Jacobs, 'Flirting with Premodernity: John Milbank and the Return of the (Christian) Masternarrative', *ARC the Journal of the Faculty of Religious Studies* 34 (2006), 131–158.

a specific relationship between Christianity and the Platonic heritage, especially the way in which the finite is related to the infinite. There may be a bit of overlap, but given the rather abstract character of metaphysics, it may help the reader to have a brief introduction to the issues at stake again. As we have seen in Chapter 1, much of the Platonic tradition wrestled with the relationship between the finite and the infinite in terms of matter as the principle of appearance of the infinite in the finite. The absolute One does not appear as the One in a multiple and changing world. It is matter that makes the One appear in the form of multiplicity. This led to the famous negative view of matter in Platonism, symbolized by the story of the cave in which the mind defectively grasps something of the eternal ideas flowing from the One/the Good. However, this well-known story also leads to a tendency deeply embedded in the Western tradition, namely, the tendency to think of the Real/Absolute/God as the beyond, and furthermore of the ultimate purpose of human life and happiness beyond earthly existence.

Matter is an entirely negative principle. In fact, it merely explains why we come to know the absolutely simple in the form of that which is not simple. As such, matter is nothing. Where matter is thought of as something, Platonism crosses over into Gnosticism, in which the Platonic Demiurge becomes a separate metaphysical principle. Radical Orthodoxy takes up the discussion concerning the status of matter in Platonism by opting for a specific version of the Platonic heritage, namely, the so-called Iamblychian–Proclean line of Neoplatonism, a form of Platonism in which matter itself is treated as participating in the one, thus allowing for a much more positive view of matter.[3]

The Platonic tradition of Iamblych and Proclos is combined with the Christian tradition. In line with its doctrine of creation, Christianity could not accept the negative view of matter common to Platonism, as the world was good because it was created by God. Once more, Radical Orthodoxy holds that the Christian doctrine of creation forces one to rethink the relationship between the infinite/Absolute and the finite/world in a more radical way than Platonism will ever be able to do, namely, in terms of the doctrine of the Trinity.

Thinking of the world as 'gift exchange' between the Father and the Son (and thus pursuing Augustine's reference to Hilary), they hold that this gift exchange is the Spirit. Thus, the One/Absolute is no longer a static transcendent notion over against a changeable and dynamic world, but the world is part of the inner dynamics of Godself. Here, a phrase from Dionysius Areopagite

[3] Catherine Pickstock, 'Justice and Prudence: Principles of Order in the Platonic City', in Graham Ward, editor, *The Blackwell Companion to Postmodern Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), 162–176; John Milbank and Catherine Pickstock, *Truth in Aquinas* (Radical Orthodoxy Series; London: Routledge, 2001), 12–13; For a critical discussion of Platonism in Radical Orthodoxy, see: Eli Diamond, 'Catherine Pickstock, Plato and the Unity of Divinity and Humanity: Liturgical or Philosophical?', in Wayne J. Hankey and Douglas Hedley, editors, *Deconstructing Radical Orthodoxy: Postmodern Theology, Rhetoric and Truth* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 1–16.

plays a key role to account for this Christian rethinking of the relationship between the One/Absolute and the world in a metaphysical way: 'God must be that in himself which goes outside God'. This, then, is in fact a Christological dynamics that can only be adequately accounted for in terms of theology.[4] If we think of God as Trinity, we think of God as the dynamics of incarnation, of the infinite becoming finite, becoming expressed in language and materiality, of God becoming man. In Milbank and Pickstock's specific terminology:

> [T]his eminent ground of eventuality in God is none other than the issuing forth of the Son and the procession of the Holy Spirit, which the Incarnation and the instituting of the Church fully disclose once again to fallen humanity. Through this disclosure we come to understand that there can be a created exterior to God, because God's interior is self-exteriorization.[5]

This, for Radical Orthodoxy, also includes soteriology. Creation as the gift exchange between the Father and the Son is essentially a matter of grace, of reconciliation and pardon. Thus, the *being* of the world is the being reconciled of God with the world, the reconciliation between the infinite and the finite.

Given this relationship between the infinite and the finite within a Christian Trinitarian framework, we are now in a position to see how Jesus Christ as a concrete historical figure is related to it. One may ask what the historical figure of Jesus Christ adds to the ontological incarnational relationship between the infinite and the finite. From the perspective of Radical Orthodoxy, the answer is that Jesus Christ 'manifests' the incarnational relationship, God's being reconciled with the world, *in excess*:[6]

> [I]f the Incarnation is not a further gift, it still brings about something in excess even of absolute divine gift, namely the conjoining of humanity to divinity. This is indeed a sharing in excess of gift, in excess of Creation, even though there was nothing originally withheld. The structure of divine redemption simply repeats this structure of divine creation, and therefore the ontological excess of the hypostatic union over its instrumental occasion in turn explicates the impossibility of

[4] Cf. Milbank and Pickstock, *Truth in Aquinas*, 12–13.

[5] Milbank and Pickstock, *Truth in Aquinas*, 86.

[6] In Milbank and Pickstock (2001, 66), it is suggested that the incarnation somehow modifies the original relation between God and the world, in that the incarnation changes the relation of the whole of creation into an incarnational or in fact a theurgic relation, that is, a relation in which the particular can really *coincide* with the infinite. This is also suggested in Ward (1999). In Milbank (2003, 66–74), however, it seems that there is no fundamental difference between the order of creation and incarnation, because the incarnation is the mere manifestation of the original order.

> this redemption. God can only restore what has gone wrong by rendering it also at one point (but to which all other points are connected – and there are many thorny problems here) united with him, identical in subsistent character to him, even though this 'adds' nothing to his own character.[7]

The specific Christology that Radical Orthodoxy defends is very much motivated by its counterpart; in Milbank's main essay on Christology this is the Christology of John Duns Scotus.[8] Milbank's reading of and objections to Scotus' Christology are interesting because we will see that many of the characteristics that Milbank sees in Scotus' Christology will return in mine, although I will attribute them to Augustine *and* will evaluate them positively rather than negatively.

In Scotus, different from Aquinas, Milbank holds, the relationship between the infinite and the finite is no longer providing the ontological basis to the relationship between Creator and creation, between the two natures in the hypostatic union of Christ, and hence, it no longer provides a theological basis for an account of reconciliation and forgiveness.[9] Thus, creation becomes something really distinct from God, something 'outside' God. Accordingly, God becomes something over against creation, thereby becoming an item among worldly items: the beginning of ontotheology. Thus, however, Milbank interestingly observes, it also becomes impossible to locate Christology within the rational relationship between the infinite and the finite. The incarnation becomes, so to speak, an accident within the contingent history between God and the world. If one does not locate the person of Christ within the proper relationship between the infinite and the finite, then indeed traditional Christology becomes something of an irresolvable riddle, in which it becomes a major problem how to think of one person as having two natures that are ultimately incommensurable. The same, Milbank holds, happens to the theological notions of reconciliation and forgiveness. In a Scotist theology, one thinks about reconciliation and forgiveness as something that matters on earth only, as an occasional problem to be resolved by a human suffering for the sins of fellow humans, rather than as the eternal reconciliation of God with humanity, thus rendering reconciliation and forgiveness a 'secular' rather than a theological meaning.

In Radical Orthodoxy, we have a post-Barthian Christology and ontology in which it is very difficult to account for the distinction between God and

[7] Milbank, *Being Reconciled*, 67, 70.

[8] Milbank, *Being Reconciled*, 61–78; this essay is very much a sequel to the essay in Milbank and Pickstock.

[9] Milbank, *Being Reconciled*, 74–78.

the world or, differently phrased, the humanity of Jesus.[10] In Radical Orthodoxy, Jesus is actually the mere manifestation of the being of being, the being of the Absolute in its inner dynamics. In this regard, as Milbank himself admits, it is in fact difficult if not impossible to account for the specificity of the divine–human relationship in Jesus over against the world as a whole.

As a Christology of manifestation in which everything that is, is thought of along Christological lines, it becomes also very difficult to incorporate a serious notion of historicity. The way out of this problem is found by turning the vice into a virtue: declare the whole of the Absolute an infinite becoming finite:

> Thus if what creation discloses of *esse* is that it somehow can exist outside of itself, what the ontological revision that is the hypostatic union discloses is that *esse* is in itself this ecstatic going outside itself. For divine *esse* is now shown to be such that a new thing can inhere in it, to be such that it can become entirely the *suppositum* of a creature outside itself, yet without real addition to itself. This last negative safeguarding of divine aseity might seem to deny that divine *esse* is also divine event, but in fact it achieves the opposite. It denies that divine *esse* can *become* event, but affirms that it *is* event, since an event can entirely come to belong to it without adding anything new. The point must be that God already was, eminently, the new event.[11]

This, however, still bypasses the problem that is at the root of the lack of historicity in Radically Orthodox Christology. It is difficult to account for the historicity of the incarnation in this Christology precisely because the 'historical' incarnation of the Son in Jesus of Nazareth is not ontologically distinct from the incarnation of the infinite in the finite. If everything is Christological, Jesus Christ becomes superfluous, indeed, as Milbank repeatedly says, 'an impossibility':

> The structure of divine redemption simply repeats this structure of divine creation, and therefore the ontological excess of the hypostatic union over its instrumental occasion in turn explicates the impossibility of this redemption. God can only restore what has gone wrong by rendering it also at one point (but to which all other points are connected – and there

[10] In a later chapter of Milbank, *Being Reconciled*, notably titled 'Christ the Exception', Milbank attempts to stress the singularity of the incarnation in Jesus, but he clearly does not succeed: 'The point is that Christ's earthly self-giving death is but a shadow of the true eternal peaceful process in the heavenly tabernacle, and redemption consists in Christ's transition from shadow to reality – which is also, mysteriously, his 'return' to cosmic omnipresence and irradiating of the shadows . . . .' (Milbank, *Being Reconciled*, 100; see also, for Milbank's grounds for the specificity of Jesus, 103).

[11] Milbank and Pickstock, *Truth in Aquinas*, 85.

> are many thorny problems here) united with him, identical in subsistent character to him, even though this 'adds' nothing to his own character.[12]

In this sense, Milbank's objection to Scotus, namely, that the incarnation is an alien addition to the being of God, is a case of the pot calling the kettle black, because in a sense, in Milbank, although the *idea* of the incarnation is put at the heart of the concept of God, the historical incarnation of the Son in Jesus of Nazareth is in fact an alien addition to the being of God, which is incarnation by default.

A similar problem becomes evident with regard to the soteriological consequences of Radical Orthodoxy's Christology. Milbank objects to an allegedly Scotist Christology that it renders reconciliation and forgiveness into a non-theological and henceforth nihilist category. Reconciliation and forgiveness become categories that are external to the nature of God, accidental results of the contingent history between God and the world. However, in Milbank, reconciliation and forgiveness become non-theological in another sense, namely, in the sense of becoming mere reformulations of the reconciliation between two principles. Milbank's typically twentieth-century rebuttal of an Anselmian satisfaction theory of atonement is telling here, insofar as it is combined with his anchoring of reconciliation in the reconciliation between everything in the being of God.[13] This, I would say, is indeed an enormous reduction of what reconciliation amounts to in a theological sense. Reconciliation between God and human beings is something quite different from the reconciliation of two metaphysical principles. Even if one, following the twentieth-century tradition, calls creation a matter of gift and grace, that does not mean that grace is also automatically forgiveness, as forgiveness has to do with sin, and sin should be taken as something more than a mere lack of recognition of the true nature of things.[14]

3.3. Augustine's Christology in Recent Scholarship

In this section, we make a step towards Augustine's Christology in terms of a discussion of recent scholarship on this subject. This section will take a slightly different form from the other essays on Augustine's interpretation in the secondary literature. It will be different in the sense that more than anywhere else in this book, I will turn to other works of Augustine to prove my

[12] Milbank, *Being Reconciled*, 70.

[13] See, for example, Milbank and Pickstock, *Truth in Aquinas*, 60: 'By this assertion, he assures us that God had no need to be appeased in order to become reconciled to us, and that, in himself, he always and eternally was so reconciled.' See also Milbank, *Being Reconciled*, 62–64.

[14] For the idea of faith as recognition of the true state of things, cf. Milbank, *Being Reconciled*, 100.

case, and I will deal with secondary literature beyond interpretations of *De Trinitate*. This is motivated by the fact that there is a very broad consensus, especially in the English-speaking world, concerning the interpretation of Augustine's Christology that sharply contradicts my own reading of the relevant books of *De Trinitate*. Therefore, it is necessary to explain why I read Augustine differently and how I see this in the context of the broader question of Augustine's Christology, apart from the *De Trinitate*. This also explains why this is the longest essay on the scholarly reception of Augustine in this book. I have to prove my case here as clearly as possible.

The consensus that has grown in scholarship on Augustine's Christology may be phrased as a 'pan-Christological' reading of Augustine's theology. This pan-Christological reading has two components: an epistemological component, which states that in Augustine's theology the true knowledge of God is exclusively rooted in the self-revelation of God in Jesus Christ. Along this line of argumentation there is a strong interest in salvation history as the source of our knowledge of God, and the question of how salvation history is related to God's nature. In the background of this line of thought is an attempt to rehabilitate Augustine over against modern criticisms of his work, criticisms that have characterized Augustine's theology as being generally theist, ontotheological or too much indebted to Greek-Hellenistic thought. The other component of the pan-Christological reading is a soteriological one, according to which it is maintained that our salvation takes place through our participation in the person of Christ. According to this reading of Augustine's Christology, our salvation consists in moving from participation in Christ as a human being through his mediatory role as the God-man into his divine nature. Central to this reading is a strong interest in Augustine's concept of the *Christus totus* and the issue of *communicatio idiomatum*.

I will criticize both components of a pan-Christological reading of Augustine's theology and try to show why I think they are misguided. Basically, I see them as anachronistic interpretations of Augustine from a twentieth-century framework of a Christology of manifestation, rather than as adhering to what I will describe below as Augustine's moral Christology.

3.3.1. Basil Studer

Let me start with a discussion of Basil Studer's work as a representative of the epistemological strand in the contemporary Christological consensus. The late Basil Studer's work on Augustine is wholly in line with developments in theology in general in the twentieth century, especially the turn to history and a theology of the incarnation in Roman Catholic theology, more or less closely linked to the so-called Nouvelle Théologie. This twentieth-century turn towards the historical and the incarnational includes a reading of the Church fathers in which the neo-scholastic emphasis on timeless truths and reason is replaced by an emphasis on history, exegesis,

Christology and Trinity.[15] This shift from timeless metaphysics to history and incarnation is already visible in the titles of Studer's books: his very last book that appeared before his death is titled *Through History to Faith: On Exegesis and the Doctrine of the Trinity in the Church Fathers* (*Durch Geschichte zum Glauben: zur Exegese und zur Trinitätslehre der Kirchenväter*)[16] and his earlier famous book on Augustine's doctrine of God deals with another typically twentieth-century problem – the relationship between nature and grace in Augustine – *The Grace of Christ and the Grace of God in Augustine of Hippo: Christocentrism or Theocentrism?*[17]

The interest in turning Augustine into someone who sees salvation history as the key to the nature of God can be traced in many aspects of Studer's reading of *De Trinitate*. It is evident, for example, from Studer's interpretation of the distinction between faith and reason. Studer sees faith primarily as based on authority, and therefore it is *history*, whereas he sees reason as the rational reflection on the tradition of faith.[18] Another aspect where it comes to the fore is in Studer's interpretation of the famous concept of *exercitatio mentis* and *purgatio mentis* in Augustine. In Studer's interpretation, this becomes an exercise in learning the tradition of faith as salvation history, rather than an exercise in a rational ascent towards God, as it was in the Platonic tradition.[19]

As such, Studer's emphasis on salvation history is a welcome addition to the literature, and, in the case of his emphasis on authority and tradition in Augustine, it certainly is important for an adequate understanding of Augustine's theology. Nevertheless, the strong focus on salvation history gives Studer's work an anachronistic twist. In the introduction to his 1996 Saint Augustine lecture, which once again is characteristically titled 'History and Faith in Augustine's *De Trinitate*', Studer shows us that he is aware of the anachronistic character of his interest in a salvation-historical Augustine:

> More concretely, I wish to see, whether, in the view of the bishop of Hippo, the trinitarian economy of salvation reveals the theology of the eternal Trinity. The question of the relation between the history

[15] Another clear example of this tradition of reading Augustine is Jacques Verhees, *God in beweging: Een onderzoek naar de pneumatologie van Augustinus* (Wageningen: Veenman, 1968). Verhees' study into Augustine's pneumatology is an almost straightforward attempt to read the Nijmegen interest in a Spirit-theology (developed by Piet Schoonenberg, for example) back into Augustine, including history in God, and an exaggerated emphasis on the salvation-historical aspects of the work of the Spirit in Augustine's theology.

[16] Basil Studer, *Durch Geschichte zum Glauben. Zur Exegese und zur Trinitätslehre der Kirchenväter* (Studia Anselmiana 141; Roma: Pontificio Ateneo S. Anselmo, 2006).

[17] Basil Studer, *The Grace of Christ and the Grace of God in Augustine of Hippo: Christocentrism or Theocentrism?* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1997).

[18] Studer, *Augustins De Trinitate*, 96–105, 123–129.

[19] Studer, *Augustins De Trinitate*, 66–78.

> of salvation and the eternal Trinity is without doubt a modern one. Yet, surely we are allowed to ask in what sense Augustine anticipates that question, without which there can be no trinitarian theology![20]

It seems to me that this anachronistic tendency is particularly evident in Studer's salvation-historical reading of what he calls the 'doctrine' of divine missions, as Studer sees it being developed by Augustine in books 2–4 of *De Trinitate*.[21] Studer seems to turn Augustine's account of the way in which the Trinity is present during the Old Testament dispensation into a theology of its own with a distinct soteriological function:

> A quick look at the chapters of *De Trinitate*, in which the divine missions of the Son and the Holy Spirit are discussed, makes their soteriological focus immediately clear. The mere fact that the visible missions have their focus upon preparing for the invisible missions of the Son and the Holy Spirit, proves the salvation-historical character of these chapters. The link between the doctrine of the missions with the theme of the only true mediating role of Christ together with the problem of science and wisdom confirm the salvation-historical orientation of the expositions on the divine missions.[22]

The problem of this way of construing the function of the discussion of the divine missions – I do not think anything like a 'doctrine' exists – is that Studer deliberately construes something not present in Augustine himself. Augustine uses the discussion of the divine missions to argue for the equality of the Trinitarian persons, not as an exercise in historical faith or as a salvation-historical theology. In addition, Studer's reading of the divine missions puts Augustine's Christology in a context of what I have called a Christology of manifestation, in which Christ makes the nature of God visible in history, but Augustine's Christology does not circle so much around making God visible in the world, but rather around the moral restoration of the sinner, as I will attempt to show below. Thus, Studer's reading of *De Trinitate* is anachronistic in two respects.

The same anachronistic twist can be found in what Studer calls the 'Christocentrism' of *De Trinitate*:

> From the foregoing, it should have become clear how justified it is to speak of a Christocentrism of the fifteen books of *De Trinitate*. The central significance of Christ becomes clear especially from the fact

[20] Basil Studer, 'The 1996 Saint Augustine Lecture: History and Faith in Augustine's *de Trinitate*', in Basil Studer, *Mysterium Caritatis: Studien zur Exegese und zur Trinitätslehre in der Alten Kirche* (Studia Anselmiana 127; Roma: Herder, 1999), 332.

[21] Studer, *Augustins De Trinitate*, 155–179.

[22] Studer, *Augustins De Trinitate*, 171, my translation.

> that the discussions of the theophanies and the missions lead to the doctrine of the incarnation, according to which only the Son has become man and his new presence endures forever in a unique way. The unique position of Christ becomes even more clear in that he, as the only true mediator, moves human beings to faith, purifies them and moves them to eternal vision through faith.[23]

Of course, one of the purposes of *De Trinitate* is to lead both the believer and the unbeliever to Christ as the only way to God. However, there is a question as to whether it makes sense to call this a 'Christocentrism', especially since 'Christocentrism', when placed in the context of a salvation-historical account of theology, is a very modern concept. We are not so interested in asking if Augustine's theology is Christocentric, but rather what sort of exact role Christ plays in his work.

3.3.2. John C. Cavadini

In other recent research the alleged doctrine of the divine missions is linked up with other aspects of a pan-Christological reading of Augustine: the idea that Augustine's theology is Christologically motivated and focused in every area of theological reflection.[24]

An interesting attempt to combine both the interest in the dialogue with pagan philosophy and the specifically Christian contribution of Augustine's *De Trinitate* is John C. Cavadini's 1992 article in *Augustinian Studies*.[25] In a rather short article, Cavadini attempts to sketching an overarching framework for the interpretation of the second half of *De Trinitate*. Although Cavadini protests against dividing the work into two halves, the main thrust of his argument concerns books 9–14. Cavadini first suggests that the 'few' readers of which Augustine speaks are in fact people with a pagan Platonic background – rightly, as I have followed Kany's account of the addressees in Chapter 1. Then Cavadini presents his main thesis concerning an overarching construct of the second half of *De Trinitate*:

> The guided tour of the human mind which we receive in books 9–14 is nothing less than an attempt at a directed 'ascent' (with several detours) from the consideration of that which is created to the

[23] Studer, *Augustins De Trinitate*, 225, my translation.

[24] Unfortunately, the new book-length interpretation of *De Trinitate* that is very much in line with a pan-Christological reading of the work, arrived too late on my desk to be extensively discussed: Gioia. This is even more true, of course, of Lewis Ayres monograph on *De Trinitate*: Lewis Ayres, *Augustine on the Trinity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

[25] John Cavadini, 'The Structure and Intention of Augustine's *De Trinitate*', *Augustinian Studies* 23 (1992), 103–123.

> contemplation – the Plotinian *noesis* – of the Creator. These books are, in effect, an extended exercise of the mind in the 'non-corporeal' mode of thinking with which the Trinity will ultimately be grasped. Perhaps, as a unit, they could be regarded therefore as one of the finest examples of what could be called Neoplatonic anagogy that remains from the antique world.[26]

After having portrayed the second half of *De Trinitate* as a Platonic ascent, and offering Platonic philosophy as the key to understanding this text, Cavadini makes a Christological U-turn:

> I would suggest, instead, that the *De Trinitate* uses the Neoplatonic soteriology of ascent only to impress it into the service of a thoroughgoing critique of its claim to raise the inductee to the contemplation of God, a critique which, more generally, becomes a declamation of the futility of any attempt to come to any saving knowledge of God apart from Christ.[27]

Cavadini then argues that all attempts at an ascent into God in *De Trinitate* fail, and that this is already prepared for in books 5–7, in which Augustine emphasizes 'the absolute uniqueness of the being of God and hence the necessity of a new sort of thinking which rises beyond images or categories appropriate only to creaturely life'.[28] Cavadini argues that the ascents in Augustine are meant to convince the reader of the absolute distance between God and creatures. This distance is then overcome in faith in the Mediator Christ:

> Our minds are liberated by this faith because in faith the awareness of the absolute distance separating God and ourselves – an awareness which we necessarily come to on our ascent to contemplation – becomes a coincident awareness of the love of God which crossed that distance. And the greater and more painfully aware we are of the distance, the more we become aware of the love of God.[29]

Cavadini stresses, however, that faith in Christ is not merely an alternative form of ascent:

> Our contemplative regard is pushed outward, from the consideration of a static metaphysical self essentially disconnected from the uncomfortable realm of the bodily and historically contingent – that realm

[26] Cavadini, 'The Structure and Intention of Augustine's *De Trinitate*', 105.
[27] Cavadini, 'The Structure and Intention of Augustine's *De Trinitate*', 106.
[28] Cavadini, 'The Structure and Intention of Augustine's *De Trinitate*', 106.
[29] Cavadini, 'The Structure and Intention of Augustine's *De Trinitate*', 109.

> which defines our ontological distance from God – to that very realm itself and to the blood, irreducibly contingent and irreducibly historical, which for Augustine became its central node. 'Faith' is thus revealed not merely as a propaedeutic to vision, but as a redirecting of the noetic regard to a decidedly un-noetic realm, and 'understanding' becomes the position of the self constituted by a growth wholly defined in that realm – it becomes, that is, a 'seeking.'[30]

Cavadini sees this turn to the contingent and the historical as a correction to Augustine's view of the knowledge of God in his early dialogues, *De Trinitate* thus functioning 'as a critique of the position that there is any accurate or saving knowledge of the Trinity apart from faith in Christ'.[31]

The latter claim, I think, is 'over the top'. Indeed, faith in Christ is crucial and indispensable in the human search for God, and the 'outward' aspect of it is what distinguishes the Christian search for God from the Neoplatonic turn to the soul as an inner divine spark, but this does not mean that the play with the theme of an ascent (and more broadly, the idea of a 'natural' access to God in Augustine) is merely negative. Indeed, in my view, the 'outward' turn is intended to repair the believer's capability to 'see' God in a direct heavenly vision. Although the road towards this vision is indeed different from that which governs a Neoplatonic ascent, it is rooted in the 'natural' sensitivity for the knowledge of God, which was implanted in human beings in creation. After the fall, the operationalization of this natural capacity for the knowledge of God in the direct vision depends on the pureness of our heart from sin, but this does not mean that the capability, as such, was lost. I will deal with these issues more extensively in the next chapter.

Indeed, *De Trinitate* has as one of its main purposes a critique of a Neoplatonic ascent into the divine. However, I do not think that it is very useful to suggest that the work itself, especially the second half, is a precious example of such an ascent, which Augustine would allow to fail in order to demonstrate to the reader that such an ascent is impossible. I think that it is more useful to say that Augustine plays with the notion of the ascent, but develops an alternative account of human vision and knowledge of God.

The problem with calling the second half an elaborate Neoplatonic ascent is that it renders the meaning of the concept of a Neoplatonic ascent almost incomprehensible because it blurs its meaning too much. Philosophically speaking, a Neoplatonic ascent, for example, depends on an ontological structure of participation of everything that exists, in a transcendent One or at least Nous, as we have argued in Chapter 1, whereas this is not the case in Augustine. Hence, the ascents in Augustine fail because, in Augustine, ascending into the divine already means something completely different from what it means

[30] Cavadini, 'The Structure and Intention of Augustine's *De Trinitate*', 109.
[31] Cavadini, 'The Structure and Intention of Augustine's *De Trinitate*', 110.

in Neoplatonism. Such differences get blurred in Cavadini's reading of *De Trinitate*. Theologically speaking, Cavadini's strong insistence on the failure of the ascent leads him into the anachronistic suggestion that knowledge of God is only possible in Christ and in the contingency and history of the Christ event. Such claims sound good to twentieth-century theological ears, but they do not reflect an accurate interpretation of Augustine's view of the relationship between our inborn relationship to God through creation, and the role of faith in Christ in restoring that relationship.

3.3.3. Robert Dodaro and Lewis Ayres

Having introduced the epistemological side of the pan-Christological reading of Augustine's theology, we now turn to its soteriological side. As was already briefly announced, the key notions for the soteriological version of the pan-Christological reading are these: the idea of *communicatio idiomatum* and the idea of the *Christus totus*. In fact, these two themes are woven together in recent literature. From the weaving of these two themes, a picture emerges of Augustine's soteriological views and their implications for Christology that runs like this: through faith, we become a member of the Church, which is, according to the theme of *Christus totus*, the body of Christ in a very literal sense. This *Christus totus*, however, is not only one Christ in the sense of a fundamental unity between the person of Christ and all who believe in Him, but also one Christ in the sense of the inseparable unity of the two natures in one person. Thus, through their participation in the Church, believers also get a share in the divine nature of Christ. This is Augustine's soteriology, recent authors suggest. Let me introduce this version of the pan-Christological reading in terms of Robert Dodaro's *Christ and the Just Society in the Thought of Augustine* and of Lewis Ayres' essay on the Christological context of the second half of *De Trinitate*. The trend of reading Augustine's theology in this way, however, is much broader than simply these two authors.

The sketch provided above is almost fully fleshed out in this quotation from Dodaro:

> Instead, by becoming man in Christ, God allows all human beings who are reborn in Christ to participate directly in his own divine nature, thus liberating them from mortality and misery by uniting them not with angelic beings, but with himself. This explanation of the unity between God and man as it is found in Christ constitutes the core element of Augustine's understanding of 'mystery' (*mysterium, sacramentum*), and he rejects alternative explanations.[32]

[32] Robert Dodaro, *Christ and the Just Society in the Thought of Augustine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 96.

Dodaro's point here goes back immediately to *De civitate Dei* 9.15:

> I do not say that He is Mediator because He is the Word, for as the Word He is supremely blessed and supremely immortal, and therefore far from miserable mortals; but He is Mediator as He is man, for by His humanity He shows us that, in order to obtain that blessed and beatific good, we need not seek other mediators to lead us through the successive steps of this attainment, but that the blessed and beatific God, having Himself become a partaker of our humanity, has afforded us ready access to the participation of His divinity. For in delivering us from our mortality and misery, He does not lead us to the immortal and blessed angels, so that we should become immortal and blessed by participating in their nature, but He leads us straight to that Trinity, by participating in which the angels themselves are blessed. Therefore, when He chose to be in the form of a servant, and lower than the angels, that He might be our Mediator, He remained higher than the angels, in the form of God, – Himself at once the way of life on earth and life itself in heaven.[33]

Dodaro describes this type of soteriology in Augustine as based on Augustine's view of the *communicatio idiomatum* between the two natures of Christ.[34]

As we will see below, a similar way of putting the soteriological significance of Christ is put, as well, in *De Trinitate* 4.4.[35] It is no coincidence that both have their locus in an anti-Porphyrian argument. I would say that both of these elevation-oriented formulations of the soteriological function of the incarnation present Augustine's Christology by way of a shortcut, and for various reasons. First, the expression 'partaking in the Trinity' in Augustine is ambiguous because for Augustine the ultimate purpose of human happiness is not the *unity with* God, but the *vision of* God. We will see that in *De Trinitate* book 4 Augustine is explicit about this and stresses that we will only be partakers in Christ's human nature. Additional evidence for this can be found in Augustine's normal way of describing our future destiny as that of becoming like angels, rather than like God. I will come back to this below in a discussion of a passage from *Peccatorum meritis et remissione*. Second, I see this soteriological description as a shortcut because it bypasses the mediation of Christ as the way by which the believer reaches his destiny, namely, via the moral restoration of the sinner in the forgiveness of sin and

[33] *civ.* 9.15, PNF translation.

[34] Dodaro, *Christ and the Just Society*, 91–104.

[35] Another clear case is *civ*. 21.16. For other cases, although the evidence presented there is very mixed: Tarsicius J. van Bavel, *Recherches sur la christologie de saint Augustin. L'humain et le divin dans le christ d'après saint Augustin* (Paradosis X; Fribourg: Éditions universitaires, 1954), 76.

justification. We will deal with this below, when we discuss book 13 of *De Trinitate*, but we see a similar classic description of Augustine's soteriology one book further in *De civitate Dei*, book 10.22:

> This is the reason why there has been vouchsafed to us, through the Mediator, this grace, that we who are polluted by sinful flesh should be cleansed by the likeness of sinful flesh. By this grace of God, wherein He has shown His great compassion toward us, we are both governed by faith in this life, and, after this life, are led onwards to the fullest perfection by the vision of immutable truth.[36]

Finally, I see this as a shortcut precisely because of the central theme of Dodaro's book: justice. In Augustine, justice is an absolute requirement for the vision of God: 'Blessed are the pure of heart, for they will see God' from the Sermon on the Mount is the mantra of Augustine's theology. We do not become pure in heart through mere participation in a body, that is the Church, or through a sort of theoretical affirmation of the creed. The message is not: become part of the Church, partake in the sacraments, and given that you are partaker in Christ's body which is the Church you are partaker in the one person Christ and thus directly united to Christ's divine nature. Such a Christian message would indeed be far too simple for Augustine. Faith in Christ, including membership in the visible body of Christ which is the Church, means the conversion of the heart through the forgiveness of sins and the restoration of one's original *iustitia* through God's grace in Christ. Indeed, this will ultimately lead to the vision of God, but not without being a member of an invisible Church of those who were elected before the foundations of the earth.

I do not mean to say that Dodaro denies all of this, but the emphasis he places on the elevation of the human nature to God's and on the mediation between the two natures of Christ is so strong that these aspects of Augustine's soteriology seem to fall out of his argument. A similar shortcut version of the soteriological implications of Christology seems to dominate Lewis Ayres' work, to which we will now turn.

Ayres' essay on Augustine's Christology as a key to understanding the second half of *De Trinitate* was initially a critical response to John Cavadini's reading of it in terms of a Platonic ascent, which we have discussed above.[37] I have already stated my agreement with Ayres' critique that setting the second half completely within the context of a Platonic ascent may not be the best way to make sense of it. However, the question is whether Ayres' suggestion that the second half can be reduced to a Christological

[36] *civ.* 10.22, PNF translation.

[37] Lewis Ayres, 'The Christological Context of *De Trinitate* XIII: Toward Relocating Books VIII–XV', *Augustinian Studies* 29 (1998), 111–139.

phenomenon is much more fruitful than Cavadini's proposal to read it as a Platonic ascent.[38]

Ayres tries to make a case for a more Christological reading of *De Trinitate* by weaving a web of links between Augustine's distinction of *scientia* and *sapientia* in book 13, and Augustine's broader Christology, especially the notions of *sacramentum et exemplum* in book 4. According to Ayres, the distinction between *scientia* and *sapientia* runs parallel to Augustine's doctrine of the two natures of Christ, not only extrinsically so, but intrinsically, so that our movement from *scientia* to *sapientia* takes place within our participation in Christ.[39]

Extending this idea further, Ayres places this movement from *scientia* to *sapientia* within the context of what he calls 'the drama' or the *dispensatio* of our redemption.[40] What exactly Ayres means by this is not clear to me, but it is clear, however, that he intends to give Augustine's Christology a more historical and dynamic character than it seemed to have in earlier secondary literature, and as far as I can see, a more historical and dynamic character than it has in Augustine himself.

3.3.4. Assessing the Evidence: *communicatio idiomatum*

The underlying notions that enable and carry the core of Dodaro and Ayres' Christological reading of Augustine's soteriology are the notions of *Christus totus*[41] and a strong reading of *communicatio idiomatum* in Augustine's Christology. Tarsicius J. van Bavel's dissertation on Augustine's Christology has played a major role in recent interest in these themes. This study had a major impact on Hubert Drobner's research into the development of the *una persona* concept. Van Bavel had a particularly strong interest in the *Christus totus*-idea, and this was certainly connected to contemporary theological interests. At the end of an English essay on the *Christus totus*-idea, Dorothee Sölle is mentioned.[42] Van Bavel also wrote on the question of *communicatio idiomatum* in his famous dissertation.[43]

[38] Ultimately, I think that Cavadini and Ayres are much closer to each other than Ayres suggests, because although Cavadini describes the second half as a Platonic ascent, he sees that Platonic ascent as intended to make a profoundly Christological claim.

[39] Ayres, 'Christological Context', 118–120.

[40] Ayres, 'Christological Context', 131–134.

[41] Lewis Ayres, 'Augustine, Christology, and God as Love: An Introduction to the Homilies on 1 John', in Kevin J. Vanhoozer, editor, *Nothing Greater Nothing Better: Theological Essays on the Love of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 67–93.

[42] Tarsicius J. van Bavel, 'The "Christus totus" Idea: A Forgotten Aspect of Augustine's Spirituality', in Thomas Finan and Vincent Twomey, editors, *Studies in Patristic Christology* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1998), 94.

[43] Van Bavel, *Recherches*, 57–63.

Concerning the question of a transition between the human and the divine nature of Christ, Van Bavel remains rather ambiguous. On the one hand, in chapter 3 of his dissertation, when he deals with the relationship between Christ's human nature and ours, Van Bavel makes quite far reaching claims about the elevation of our human nature through the assumption of our human nature in Christ's one person.[44] Similarly, Van Bavel explicitly claims that in the assumption of our human nature in Christ our human nature as such has been saved, and not merely this single human nature of Christ.[45] On the other hand, when assessing the evidence in Van Bavel's dissertation, it struck me that Van Bavel does not link the two themes nor does he use the *Christus totus*-idea as a key to our elevation into the divine. This would be very difficult even for Van Bavel, because he takes his point of departure from Augustine's own clear distinction between the different forms of the one person of Christ, and on such a basis he maintains a distinction between the unity of the person of Christ in the incarnation and the unity of Christ in the body of Church.[46]

Similarly, Van Bavel is far more careful on the question of *communicatio idiomatum* than his more recent followers. It is true that Van Bavel begins his exposition of *communicatio idiomatum* with a few references in which it seems that Augustine uses divine predicates when speaking of the human Christ and vice versa, but he is keen to show that these closely follow Augustine's heuristic rule for speaking about Christ, in which an exchange of predicates is permitted when speaking about the one person of Christ, but in which predicates are reserved for the respective natures when the discourse is on the level of the two natures. It is also true that Van Bavel goes to some lengths to rebut older Lutheran critics of Augustine (Van Bavel speaks about 'Protestants', but he means Lutherans; he mentions Reuter and Scheel),[47] who suggest that the *communicatio idiomatum* in Augustine is only a 'verbal' communication of terms. However, this is an attempt to nuance their criticism, it is not the heart of his own view. It seems to me that the key to Van Bavel's reading of this issue appears in this summary:

> His views in sum: in the one person of Christ there are two natures; all that is stated while omitting the distinction between the two natures, must be related to the one Person; but if the two natures are distinguished from one another, the acts must be attributed to their respective natures. But, having said this, who would deny that the mystery still remains? Saint-Augustine, however, leaves the problem

[44] Van Bavel, *Recherches*, 77.
[45] Van Bavel, *Recherches*, 76.
[46] This is the case both in the more recent article in English and in the dissertation in French. See Van Bavel, *Recherches,* 85; Van Bavel, 'Christus totus', 110–118.
[47] Van Bavel, *Recherches*, 60.

> for what it is . . . At this point, human discourse remains suspended between the abstract and the concrete.[48]

This, it seems to me, is a very nuanced and accurate description of the fact that Augustine utilizes *communicatio idiomatum* as a heuristic tool, and not as a description at the level of the ontological nature of Christ. This ontological nature, Van Bavel rightly emphasizes, remains a mystery.

It seems, therefore, that the idea of a strong version of *communicatio idiomatum* can be better attributed to Hubert Drobner's work than to Van Bavel's. Drobner explicitly affirms that there is *communicatio idiomatum* in Augustine's Christology, although he does not clearly say what he means by this: 'Although Augustine does not use the technical term *communicatio idiomatum*, his statements in this regard concerning the *una persona* of Christ are nevertheless unambiguous.'[49] Therefore, in the remainder of this section, I will concentrate on some of Drobner's prooftexts for *communicatio idiomatum* and evaluate their persuasive force.

My problem with the idea of *communicatio idiomatum* in Augustine is twofold: first, I do not see any quotation in Augustine that suggests what I would technically see as *communicatio idiomatum*, and second, in those passages where Augustine affirms the unity of Christ's person in two natures – those passages which Drobner and his followers see as confirming *communicatio idiomatum* – I see no soteriological connection being made between the unity of Christ's person and our salvation through this unity of Christ's person.

Let me begin first with the latter problem. Naturally I cannot discuss all the passage that mentions the unity of Christ's person, but let me mention a very clear case. The *Enchiridion* is a late work and it very clearly and concisely discusses the unity of Christ's person:

> Wherefore Christ Jesus, the Son of God, is both God and man; God before all worlds; man in our world: God, because the Word of God; and man, because in His one person the Word was joined with a body and a rational soul. Wherefore, so far as He is God, He and the Father are one; so far as He is man, the Father is greater than He. For when He was the only Son of God, not by grace, but by nature, that He might be also full of grace, He became the Son of man; and He Himself unites both natures in His own identity, and both natures constitute one Christ;[50]

[48] Van Bavel, *Recherches*, 60, my translation.

[49] Hubertus R. Drobner, *Person-Exegese und Christologie bei Augustinus. Zur Herkunft der Formel una persona* (Philosophia Patrum: Interpretations of Patristic Texts VIII; Leiden: Brill, 1986), 258, my translation.

[50] *ench.* 35, PNF translation.

In those passages, however, where the unity of Christ's person is discussed, no mention whatsoever is made of the soteriological purpose of the Son of God's assumption of flesh. It is not said: because Christ is like this, we can become suchlike as well. Instead, the discussion of Christ's person in two natures is followed by what I would say is Augustine's preferred and standard soteriological connection, namely, Christ's death for our sins which justifies us before God. The discussion of the unity of Christ's person in two natures serves an exegetical and heuristic purpose, such as the *forma dei* and *forma servi* distinction that we will see in book 1 below, namely, how those things which seem to be said about the Son of God in Scripture can point to Jesus as the Son of Man and vice versa. In that regard, I would say that Van Bavel's Lutheran opponents are right to say that Augustine's *communicatio idiomatum* is a rule of Christological grammar, not a statement about ontology. Whether this is to be criticized is another matter of course, but as such the verbal reading of *communicatio idiomatum* is correct.

This is confirmed when we address my former problem, namely, that I do not see where Augustine would adhere to something like a *communicatio idiomatum* taken in a proper technical meaning of the term. To me, *communicatio idiomatum* would mean that attributes thought to belong either to the divine or to the human nature of Christ may properly be attributed of the other nature. For example, the fact that the Son of man, that is, Christ spoken of according to his human nature, was born in time could also be said then to refer to the Son of God, that is, Christ spoken of according to his divine nature.

What Augustine does in all of those passages, in which scholars speak of *communicatio idiomatum*, is to explain how sometimes it seems that things belonging to one of the natures can be predicated of the other; however, it is crucial to see that for Augustine this does not mean anything at the ontological level. On the ontological level the distinction and the appropriation of attributes remain intact without any exchange or confusion. The license to use confusing *language* – mostly coming from Scripture – lies in the unity of Christ's person, which makes it possible to suggest that the Son of God died on the cross, for example, but this unity of person nevertheless guarantees that the distinction between the two natures is retained. *Epistula* 169 is a good example of this:

> But the man was united to the Word; the Word was not united to the man by changing into the man, and in that way he is said to be the Son of God along with the man he assumed. Hence the same Son of God is immutable and coeternal with the Father, but only with regard to the Word, and the Son of God was buried, but only with regard to the flesh.[51]

[51] *ep*. 169.2.7.

Notice how at the beginning of the quote it is already clear that no human attributes, involving any level of change, are allowed to be attributed to Christ as the Son of God, and this is maintained at the end of the quote, where it is said that the Son of God was laid in the grave, *but only according to his human nature*. This is confirmed in what follows a few sentences later:

> [S]o Christ is said to be God, the Son of God, the Lord of glory, and anything else of the sort insofar as he is the Word, and yet God is correctly said to have been crucified, though it is certain that he suffered this in terms of the flesh and not insofar as he is the Lord of glory.[52]

The same is true of another beloved prooftext for the idea of *communicatio idiomatum* in Augustine, Tractate 27 on the Gospel of John:

> So then, Christ is one being: Word, soul and flesh, one Christ; Son of God and Son of man, one Christ. Son of God always, Son of Man from a point in time, but still one Christ as regards the unity of person. He was in heaven, when he was speaking on earth. The Son of Man was in heaven in the same way as the Son of God was on earth; the Son of God on earth in the flesh he had taken, the Son of Man in heaven in the unity of person.[53]

When it comes to linking up the allegedly ontological *communicatio idiomatum* to an elevation soteriology, a very interesting case is a passage in *pec. mer.*, discussed by Volker Henning Drecoll in an article on the doctrine of grace and the Trinity in *De Trinitate* book 9. Passages from *Peccatorum meritis et remissione* are a beloved prooftext for a strong version of *communicatio idiomatum* anyway.

This is what Drecoll says about the connection between the interconnection of the doctrine of grace, the incarnation and the soteriological destiny of believers:

> Salvation is only possible through Christ, and this is because of his incarnation. He is the only *mediator*, who mediates reconciliation with God through his *una gratia*. This Christological accentuation of the event of grace, Augustine emphasizes especially in his exegesis of the conversation with Nicodemus. The *regeneratio spiritualis* is only possible through Christ, more precisely, through his *descendere–ascendere*. What is meant is the incarnation that is to be understood as the descent of Christ and thus as the partaking of the flesh in the *divinitas* in

[52] *ep.* 169.2.8.
[53] *in Ioh. ev. tr.* 27.4.

> heaven. Human beings, who become *unus Christus* with the incarnate, ascend with him.[54]

According to Drecoll, the scheme that Augustine suggests here is: Christus descends from heaven as divine and becomes human, and our human destiny through the grace of the incarnation is that we as born human become divine through sharing in the one person of Christ. As we have seen in Dodaro's quote from *De civitate Dei* and as we will show in one quote from *De Trinitate*, there are a few passages where Augustine follows this scheme, and I have given reasons why I think that these passages present a shortcut version of Augustine's Christology. The interesting thing of *pec. mer.*, however, is that Augustine subtly nuances the scheme and thus avoids the idea of a human elevation towards the divine, which is all the more interesting because we find all the ingredients here of what makes scholars read it the other way around: the *Christus totus*, the one person in two natures, and their soteriological aim. Here is what Augustine says:

> And thus by reason of the distance between the divinity and human weakness, the Son of God remained in heaven, and the Son of Man lived on earth. But by reason of the unity of the person, by which the two substances are the one Christ, the Son of God lived on earth, and the Son of Man remained in heaven. Thus, from believing things that are more difficult to believe, one comes to believe things easier to believe. For, the divine substance, which is far more remote and more lofty by reason of its incomparable superiority, was able on our account to take up a human substance so that there came to be one person, and thus the Son of Man, who was on earth on account of the weakness of the flesh, is himself in heaven by reason of the divinity in which the flesh shares. Hence, how much more believable it is that other holy human beings who believe in him become one Christ with the man Christ. Thus, when all ascend by reason of his grace and union with him, the one Christ who came down from heaven ascends into heaven.[55]

Notice how Augustine breaks the scheme by saying that the faithful do not become one with the divine–human person of Christ but with the *man* Christ (*homines sancti et fideles eius fiunt cum homine Christo unus*

[54] Volker Henning Drecoll, 'Mens-notitia-amor. Gnadenlehre und Trinitätslehre in *De Trinitate* IX und in *De peccatorum meritis/De spiritu et littera*', in Johannes Brachtendorf, editor, *Gott und sein Bild – Augustins De Trinitate im Spiegel gegenwärtiger Forschung* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2000), 143, my translation.

[55] *pec. mer.* 60.

Christus). This is consistent with his wording earlier on in the same chapter, where he says:

> He explains, 'In this way, there will come about the spiritual birth that transforms earthly human beings into heavenly ones. Human beings could not attain this, unless they were made my members. Thus the same one ascends who came down, since no one ascends save the one who came down.'[56]

Notice how he avoids using the Latin term that Drecoll puts at the centre of his reading: *divinitas*, speaking of *ut sint caelestes homines ex terrenis*. In what follows (chapter 61 of *pec. mer.*), we indeed find a soteriology that circles completely around the theme of sin and forgiveness rather than deification through an ontological mediation. Alternatively phrased: although Augustine almost takes the shortcut of an incarnational soteriology, he in fact develops the soteriological aim of the incarnation through the cross. As we will see below, this is perfectly consistent with Augustine's Christology in *De Trinitate*, where he will say, among other things, that Christ is the head of the Church only according to his human nature.

All in all, although there is a strong scholarly tradition in favour of a *communicatio idiomatum* in Augustine, I would say that Augustine's way of formulating the one person of Christ in two natures is rather the opposite of what the notion of *communicatio idiomatum* is supposed to mean, and this is confirmed by the soteriological implications of Augustine's Christology. Soteriologically, and I will argue for this more extensively below, Augustine's Christology is directed towards the moral restoration of the sinner rather than an elevation into the divine.

3.4. Book 1: Forma servi *and* forma dei

Finally, after a long journey from twenty-first-century Christology to twenty-first-century reception of Augustine's Christology, it is now high time to move on to a reading of Augustine himself.

We start with book 1. After the 'my pen is on the watch' passage (1.1–3) and some discussion of how to take the book as a whole (1.4–6), Augustine proceeds with what in fact is the main theme of the first half of the book: the defence of the Nicene/Constantinopolitan confession of Father, Son and Spirit as one God in three persons.[57] Hence, what Augustine is interested in

[56] *pec. mer.* 60.

[57] For the idea of Augustine's *De Trinitate* as mainly and perhaps merely a defence of the Nicene tradition, see Michel René Barnes, 'Rereading Augustine's Theology of the Trinity', in Davis et al., *The Trinity: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Trinity*, 145–176; Ayres, 'Fundamental Grammar', 51–76; Ayres, 'Christological Context', 111–139.

is the full equality and unity of the Trinity. In books 1 to 4, he deals with the equality and unity of the Trinity with regard to exegetical issues. The central question is how the Nicene tradition can be brought in agreement with various elements from Scripture in which it seems there has been suggested a difference of rank – equality – and a difference of substance – unity – in the Trinity that is God (1.7ff.). In 1.7–13, Augustine tries to prove from Scripture that the Son and the Spirit are God. From 1.14 and onwards, then, Augustine deals with the distinction that determines the subsequent argument in book 1, the so-called *regula canonica*,[58] that distinguishes between expressions about Jesus according to the form of a slave (*secundum formam servi*) and expressions about Jesus according to the form of God (*secundum formam dei*):

> But because of the Word of God's incarnation, which for the sake of restoring us to health [*salus*] took place that *the man Christ Jesus* might be *mediator of God and man* (1 Tm 2:5), many things are said in the holy books to suggest, or even state openly that the Father is greater than the Son. . . . And so it is not without reason that scripture says both; that the Son is equal to the Father and that the Father is greater than the Son. The one is to be understood in virtue of the form of God, the other in virtue of the form of a servant, without any confusion. (1.14)

Several things in these quotations are worth noticing. First, the purpose of the incarnation: '*pro salute nostra reparanda*'. We will see in due course what the *salus* is that Augustine has in mind. Here, we see at least that the *salus* needs to be repaired, that is: there was an original *salus*, we have lost it now, and we need to regain it, and it was for this purpose that the Son of God, the second Person of the Trinity, became a human being. As we will see in the remainder, this is Augustine's Christology in a nutshell. Then, we see something special about Jesus as the mediator: '*ut mediator dei et hominum esset homo Christus Iesus*'. This is to state explicitly that it is the concrete human being Christ Jesus that is the mediator between God and man. We will see some reasons for this in due course, as for Augustine, it cannot be the God-man Jesus who mediates to see God because, for Augustine, this would mean: to know Jesus as a human being, would mean to know him as God also, which implies salvation.

Finally, the '*sine ulla confusione*' is catching our attention. It is tempting to find in it an anticipation of the 'unconfusedly' of the Chalcedonian Creed. Still, I think we should be very careful not to equate these two phrases all too easily, because Augustine is not, as the Chalcedonian Creed is, dealing with the relationship between the two natures of Christ in one person. It is very tempting to read Augustine's distinction between the *forma servi* and

[58] Studer, *Augustins De Trinitate*, 92.

the *forma dei* in parallel to the distinction between the two natures of Christ, but it is important to notice that Augustine does *not* use the distinction for this purpose. He does not, as, for example, the *Tomus Leonis* does, use the distinction to suggest what Jesus can do as a human being – suffer, forget, and so on – and what he cannot do as God.[59] Augustine's distinction is primarily a hermeneutical device.[60] Thus, it does not automatically lead to what twentieth-century dogmaticians call a Nestorian Christology. What is said of Jesus *secundum formam servi* and *secundum formam dei* points to the two perspectives from which Scripture approaches the life of Jesus on earth. It does not explain the relationship between the divine and human nature within the person of Jesus.

Before we go on to see how Augustine hints at the soteriological significance of the incarnation in book 1, let us take a look at some concrete examples of how the distinction between *forma servi* and *forma dei* actually works. An interesting example is Augustine's discussion of the well-known saying of Jesus: 'No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father' (NIV, Mk 13.32). Augustine explains this text by pointing to various cases in the Gospels where Jesus says something for pedagogic purposes, and he refers to the Apostle Paul who says to the Corinthians that he taught them as children rather than grown-ups. In other words, Jesus in fact knew the day and hour of the last judgement, but he did not say it because the disciples were not in the appropriate disposition to know it. He then closes the discussion with this remark:

> It is by the same manner of speaking that one is said not to know something when one conceals it, as a corner that is concealed is called blind. The scriptures employ no manner of speaking that is not in common human usage – they are, after all, speaking to human beings. (1.23)

In fact, this reading of Mark 13 is an anti-Nestorian use of the distinction between *forma servi* and *forma dei*, as the divine–human person Jesus knew the moment of the last judgement. A Nestorian reading would split up Jesus and suggest that as man, Jesus did not know it.

Let me give a second example: Augustine's discussion of 1 Cor. 2.8, where it is said that 'the Lord of glory has been crucified', an example with much more 'Nestorian' implications. Augustine reads this text in the light of another one, 2 Cor. 13.4: 'For to be sure, he was crucified in weakness, yet he lives by

[59] Leo the Great, *Epistolae*, 28.6 (='Tomus Leonis'). T. J. van Bavel argues in a note to the Dutch translation of *De Trinitate* that Augustine prefers to speak of the concrete humanity or divinity of Jesus rather than his divine or human nature: Van Bavel, *De Trinitate*, 448.

[60] As to the transition from a hermeneutical and a 'metaphysical' use of the proto-Chalcedonian concepts in Augustine, see Drobner, although I would disagree with a number of the claims that Drobner makes with regard to Augustine's Christology.

God's power.' Augustine then says: '[A]nd yet the Lord of glory was crucified, because it is quite correct to talk even of God being crucified – owing to the weakness of the flesh, though, not to the strength of godhead' (1.28).[61]

Although the emphasis in book 1 is on exegetical issues, book 1 also gives some hints towards the soteriological significance of the incarnation, as we had in the phrase '*pro salute nostra reparanda*'. Augustine is moved to the soteriological significance of the incarnation in his discussion of the phrase from Paul: 'When he hands over the kingdom to the Father', which some used to suggest that the Son was less than the Father because he gives the kingdom to the Father. Augustine, however, interprets the handing over of the kingdom as the initiation of the beatific vision, and it is exactly this that makes up our sole *salus*: to see God face to face. As Augustine says it a little later: 'For the fullness of our happiness, beyond which there is none else, is this: to enjoy God the Trinity in whose image we were made' (1.18). This, however, is not something that is given to the faithful in this life and the reason is given in, perhaps, Augustine's most favourite quote: 'Blessed are the pure of heart, because they will see God' (1.17 and 28).[62] Because none of the faithful reaches the state of purity of heart in this life, they are not allowed to see God, as Augustine says with another reference to Scripture: 'Who will see God and live?' This, then, is also the reason why only the man Jesus is the mediator between God and human beings. And why, as Augustine says in 1.24, Christ is the head of his body, the Church, *secundum formam servi*, that is, according to his humanity, as the Church is an earthly community comprising both good and bad people. Christ as the head of the Church according to his divinity would, following the logic of Augustine's soteriology, inevitably lead to a Donatist Church. God as God can never be seen by sinful human beings. It is important to see that in Augustine's argument, not only here, but in *De Trinitate* as a whole, the impossibility to see God is not primarily ontologically or philosophically motivated. It is not, as some twentieth-century critics of the tradition held, that God cannot be seen because of the *finitum non capax infiniti* adagium. This adagium is in fact rejected by Augustine, as we see in books 2 and 3, where Augustine holds

[61] Cf. Van Bavel, *Recherches*, 57–58, for a dubious reference to this passage, skipping the last part of the sentence.

[62] Michel René Barnes, 'The Visible Christ and the Invisible Trinity: Mt. 5:8 in Augustine's Trinitarian Theology of 400', *Modern Theology* 19 (2003), 329–355. Although I agree with Barnes that this text provides the key to understanding Augustine's theology, I disagree with the way he attempts to reconstruct the significance of it. In an attempt to do away with the non-Christological character of Augustine's thought, Barnes overstates and thereby misrepresents Augustine's Christology by suggesting that the vision of God is impossible for human beings in this life. In suggesting this, he ignores the importance of the distinction between a prelapsarian and a postlapsarian account of the knowledge/vision of God. In Augustine, a prelapsarian access to God through the mind keeps determining his Christological solution to the problem of sin, as I try to show below.

that the Father (!) can speak to us. Thus, the Father need not reveal himself only in the Son, but can reveal himself as the Father. This is true of God as Trinity too, as is also evident, for example, from the '*Ego sum qui sum*' in *Confessiones* 7. The reason that we cannot see God in Augustine is motivated by what we could call an Old Testament – although from a New Testament frame of reference – 'fear of the Lord', what we might call the KBD JHWH, the holiness of the Lord. This, as we will see below, will have crucial ramifications for the sort of soteriological significance that Augustine will see in the incarnation.

As a final note to book 1, we see here a problem that will return in later books, namely, the question as to how this rendering invisible of the 'God in Jesus' is to be maintained with regard to Christ as mediator. The question will be, whether and if so, in what way the human Jesus mediates the knowledge of God. In trying to answer this question, we skip books 2 and 3, be it only to put my conviction to practice that the attention to these books and the 'doctrine of divine missions' supposedly developed in them,[63] is a mere product of an anachronistic reading of the twentieth-century interest in salvation history back into Augustine.

3.5. Book 4: The Incarnation

In book 4, we arrive at the discussion of the incarnation proper. The mission of the Son of God, which was the topic of books 2 and 3, must be distinguished from the way in which the Son can be said to have been sent in the Old Testament period. Dealing with book 1, we have ignored the significance of the introductions for the discussion of Augustine's Christology. Mostly, the introductions take a step back and address more general questions of a proper approach to the search for God, Augustine's openness to criticism, and his motives for putting his ideas on the Trinity to paper. Book 4 is no exception to this rule, but in this case, I think Augustine's remarks are important for understanding the context of book 4 as a whole, more than the prologues to the other books, because here, almost immediately at the beginning of the book, the discussion of the soteriological significance of Christology is related to the background and situation of the intended audience:

> [T]he mind that knows its own weakness deserves more respect than the one that, with no thought at all for a little thing like that, sets out to explore, or even knows already, the course of the stars, while ignorant of the course it should follow itself to its own health [*salus*] and

[63] Studer, *Augustins De Trinitate*, 155–179. The exaggerated attention paid to the 'theophanies' is to be attributed to Studer, and is now taken over in particular by Barnes and Ayres.

> strength. But take someone who has been roused by the warmth of the Holy Spirit and has already woken up to God; and in loving him he has become cheap in his own estimation; and being eager yet unable to go in to him, he has taken a look at himself in God's light, and discovered himself, and realized that his own sickness cannot be compounded with God's cleanness. So he finds it a relief to weep and implore him over and over again to take pity and pull him altogether out of his pitiful condition, and he prays with all confidence once he has received the free gratuitous pledge of health through the one and only savior and enlightener granted us by God. (4.1)

Let me draw attention to a number of central tenets directing the discussion in book 4: (1) The polemics against those who seek to find the truth in the boldness of their own intellectual capacities. Those seeking for the real truth have been touched by the Holy Spirit and thereby discovered their weakness and humility. (2) Those taught humility cannot approach God because they discover their illness that is not in accordance with the purity of God. They pray for mercy; they deplore their sins. (3) They pray with hope because they have already received the security of salvation in their '*unicum saluatorem hominis et illuminatorem*'. (4) This trust in the only saviour and light of humanity is the guarantee for true knowledge. The knowledge of one's own weakness is more important than the knowledge of the limits of the world.

A little further, we get a glimpse of the purpose of Augustine's argument in this book; we also get a glimpse of who these people were that are proud of the knowledge of the world:

> As such a human being,[64] O Lord my God, I sigh among your poor ones in the family of your Christ, and I beg from you a morsel of your bread with which to reply to people who do not *hunger and thirst for justice* (Mt 5:6), but are well fed and have more than enough. What has satisfied them is their own imaginings, not your truth. This they thrust away from them, and so bounce back and fall into their own emptiness. (4.1)

It is important to bear this strong interest in bringing those 'not hungering and thirsting for justice' to Christ in mind when reading book 4, because in fact, we will see Augustine's profound interest here, to bring his Christian and Catholic faith in Christ to the attention of his pagan or heterodox readers.

The attempt to bring foreigners to Christ starts immediately when Augustine proceeds to deal with the purpose of the incarnation. Notice how

[64] That is, as such a person humiliated by the Holy Spirit.

carefully Platonic notions of alienation from the One have been intertwined with the Christian history of salvation:

> But we were exiled from this unchanging joy, yet not so broken and cut off from it that we stopped seeking eternity, truth, and happiness even in this changeable time-bound situation of ours – for we do not want, after all, to die or to be deceived or to be afflicted. (4.2)

In the meantime, however – but of course Augustine is eager *not* to tell his readers – we are already jumping into Christianity:

> So God sent us sights suited to our wandering state, to admonish us that what we seek is not here, and that we must turn back from the things around us to where our whole being springs from – if it did not, we would not even seek these things here. (4.2)

One would almost be deceived, believing that the leap into Christianity fits into the Platonic framework, but it does not. In Platonism, the dependency on the One is embedded in our rational relationship to it. In Augustine, we are suddenly taught that we need revelation to be able to know that we have been alienated from our true destination and that if we were not reminded, we would never search for it.

And then, of course, if the trap has been opened, we should immediately fall into it:

> First we had to be persuaded how much God loved us, in case out of sheer despair we lacked the courage to reach up to him. Also we had to be shown what sort of people we are that he loves, in case we should take pride in our own worth, and so bounce even further away from him and sink even more under our own strength. So he dealt with us in such a way that we could progress rather in his strength; he arranged it so that the power of charity would be brought to perfection in the weakness of humility. (4.2)

What do we need? Exactly, we need Christ because Christ brings us forgiveness of sins through his death at the cross, and Christ shows us the way to God, namely, the way of humility. Augustine quotes Paul: 'For my strength is made perfect in weakness' (2 Cor. 12.9).

But it might be that the pagan is not convinced so easily. This is all too Christian, is it not? But wait, Augustine has another arrow in his quiver. He starts all over again, playing with the Platonic preoccupation with unity and multiplicity. Again, the background is in fact the prologue from the Gospel of John; hence, no real Platonism, but a Platonism baptized by Christianity beforehand:

> So because there is but one Word of God, *through which all things were made* (Jn 1:1–6), which is unchanging truth, in which all things are primordially and unchangingly together, not only things that are in the whole of this creation, but things that have been and will be; (4.3)

This then leads to an elaboration on everything existing in the Word of God, finished with a quote from Paul on the Areopagus in Acts 17: 'In him do we live and are we'.

Wonderful, isn't it? This sounds familiar: everything is in the Word, we need to go from multiplicity to unity, from chaos to harmony to reach our true state of being. The pagan readers are satisfied again; this is just business as usual. They will read on where they had almost given up. But beware, they get their next blow from the very same prologue of John's Gospel:

> But *the light shines in the darkness and the darkness did not comprehend it* (Jn 1:5). The darkness is the foolish minds of humans, blinded by depraved desires and unbelief. To cure these and make them well *the Word* through which all things were made *became flesh and dwelt among us* (Jn 1:14). Our enlightenment is to participate in the Word, that is, in that *life which is the light of humans* (Jn 1:4). Yet we were absolutely incapable of such participation and quite unfit for it, so unclean were we through sin, so we had to be cleansed. Furthermore, the only thing to cleanse the wicked and the proud is the blood of the just and the humility of God; to contemplate God, which by nature we are not, we would have to be cleansed by him who became what by nature we are and what by sin we are not. (4.4)

Let me draw attention to the details: (1) The sinner will not be able to reach his or her destination: participating in the unity and harmony of the Word. Remember: 'blessed are the pure of heart'. How could they be saved? By the incarnation of the Word, who dies for our sins at the cross, and shows us the way to God: humility. Again the theme we encountered both in book 1, the Prologue to book 4 and the previous paragraph. (2) It is now interwoven with the typically Platonic theme of participation and even deification: 'So he applied to us the similarity of his humanity to take away the dissimilarity of our iniquity, and becoming a partaker of our mortality he made us partakers of his divinity' (4.4). This is certainly the most difficult quotation for my anti-participationist reading of *De Trinitate* as a whole, but we should not be triggered by the concept of deification,[65] because it occurs here only in passing. We will come back to it in due course. The context in which it appears is in fact the context of sin, sacrifice and forgiveness. We are in the context of

[65] See, more generally, Gerald Bonner, 'Augustine's Conception of Deification', *Journal of Theological Studies* 37 (1986), 369–386.

the Old Testament and Paul, but at any rate, carefully interwoven with central themes from Augustine's Christian and pagan contemporary context.

This does not change with the sentence following immediately, touching on the concept of deification:

> It was surely right that the death of the sinner issuing from the stern necessity of condemnation should be undone by the death of the just man issuing from the voluntary freedom of mercy, his single matching our double. This match – or agreement or concord or consonance or whatever the right word is for the proportion of one to two – is of enormous importance in every construction or interlock – that is the word I want – of creation. What I mean by this interlock, it has just occurred to me, is what the Greeks call *harmonia*. (4.4)

Notice how subtle the rhetoric is. Do you believe it: 'it has just occurred to me'? Notice how the theme is profoundly scriptural, the typically Pauline double death of humanity combined with the single death of Christ, but the way of putting the matter is Platonic, playing with the duality of multiplicity and unity.

This introduction of the harmony between single and double leads to one of the most esoteric passages in *De Trinitate* (4.5–10), the discussion of the ratio between the single and the double, followed by a kind of Midrashic speculation about the number six in Scripture. We should not overlook, however, that in spite of all the esotericism, the play with the number six does not do away with the overall soteriological context of Augustine's Christology: the twofold restoration that humanity needs to be able to see God and the unique role of Christ in making this restoration possible.

This soteriological context then is the main problem of the Radically Orthodox appropriation of Augustine's Christology in favour of an aesthetic Christology of manifestation. In fact, Radical Orthodoxy declares the flirt with Platonic terminology and conceptuality to be the main thrust of Augustine's argument overlooking the fundamental changes that Augustine applies to the Platonic framework.

In the case of Augustine's Christology, speaking of fundamental changes is even an understatement. Here, the seemingly esoteric form of the argument is no more than a superficial marketing trick to sell profoundly biblical truths to people with Platonic or more broadly heterodox or pagan preferences. We see a precious example of this again at the end of the discussion of the ratio between single and double. At the beginning of 4.11, we get a new play with the concept of unity:

> By wickedness and ungodliness with a crashing discord we had bounced away, and flowed and faded away from the one supreme true God into the many, divided by the many, clinging to the many. And so it was fitting that at the beck and bidding of a compassionate God the

> many should themselves acclaim together the one who was to come, and that acclaimed by the many together the one should come, and that the many should testify together that the one had come. (4.11)

Then, quoting John 17, Augustine introduces the unifying work of the one mediator between God and humanity, who prays to his Father: 'Let them all be one, as we are one.' Nothing is more pleasing to the ears of the Platonics of course: everything becomes one. Notice, however, how immediately afterwards, Augustine fills the quest for unity among the Platonics with a profoundly Christian concept of unity:

> So it is that the Son of God, who is at once the Word of God and the mediator between God and humans, the Son of man, equal to the Father by oneness of divinity and our fellow by taking of humanity, so it is that he intercedes for us insofar as he is man, while not concealing that as God he is one with the Father, and among other things he speaks as follows: . . . *that they may all be one as you, Father, in me and I in you, that they too may be one in us* . . . (Jn 17:20).
>
> He did not say 'that I and they may be one [thing/substance],' though as he is the Church's head and the Church is his body he could have said 'that I and they may be' not one thing but 'one person,' since head and body make the one Christ. But he is declaring his divinity, consubstantial with the Father . . . in his own proper way, that is, in the consubstantial equality of the same substance, and he wants his disciples to be one in him, because they cannot be one in themselves, split as they are from each other by clashing wills and desires, and the uncleanness of their sins; so they are cleansed by the mediator that they may be one in him, not only by virtue of the same nature whereby all of them from the ranks of mortal men are made equal to the angels, but even more by virtue of one and the same wholly harmonious will reaching out in concert to the same ultimate happiness, and fused somehow into one spirit in the furnace of charity. (4.12)

In fact here, we get a refutation of Augustine's own play with the notion of deification here. What Christ does is not make us gods, but he makes us members of the Church! And, as Augustine mentions in book 1, the Church is not a divine, but a human body of which the man Christ is the head.[66] One might wonder about the reasons behind Augustine's idea of becoming angels (see also 3.3.4). Is this not some sort of Platonic residue where we get rid of our

[66] Augustine is alluding here to the concept of 'Christus totus' that he uses elsewhere, primarily in the *Homilies on the First Epistle of John*, see Van Bavel, 'Christus totus', 84–94. As I have argued above, contrary to Dodaro, I do not see the concept of 'Christus totus' as an example of a transition between Christ's divine and human nature.

corporeality, gender, materiality, and so on? Not at all. It is a simple quote from Scripture: 'At the resurrection people will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven' (Mt. 22.30; Mk 12.25; Lk. 20.36). In addition, it should be emphasized that the becoming of angels does not mean to get rid of one's corporeality, as is primarily clear from the fact that even Jesus takes his corporeality with him into heaven, and as Augustine clearly describes of all the faithful at the end of *De civitate Dei*.[67]

3.6. Book 13: The Purpose of the Incarnation

In book 13, we come back to issues concerning Christology, but now after and in the context of the discussions concerning the traces (*vestigia*) and more importantly the *imago* of the Trinity. The second half of the *De Trinitate* is the subject of many complicated questions. It has been associated with Platonic speculation, with subjectivity theory, Cartesianism, with a Platonic ascent, and so on. There is not space here to resolve all these questions, and I think it is also not necessary, because the Christological framework that we have encountered so far provides the context for the discussion in book 13. We will take elements from the intermediate books (5–12) up into the attempt to make sense of the purpose of the incarnation as Augustine develops it in book 13.

As we have seen in the earlier books, the *salus* of the human being consists in the *visio Dei*, the seeing of God face to face. This vision of God has become impossible because of sin, which binds human beings to materiality and desire. Therefore, the second Person of the Trinity enters into human history to show us that God is willing to receive us and forgive our sins, and to show us the way back to God, not through the way of intellectual speculation, but through the way of humble acts of righteousness and love.

This is the matrix of Augustine's Christology in books 1 to 4. In book 13, this matrix is phrased in terms of the distinction that Augustine developed in book 12, the distinction between science and wisdom. Wisdom is, so to speak, the direct link between the mind and the eternal things: God. Science is the link between the mind and the material changeable world.[68] Book 13, then, shows how we learn to know God – in terms of the second half of the *De Trinitate*: grow into the image of God – through science, that is, the knowledge of the world. Naturally, parallel to books 1 to 4, this results in a discussion of Christology, more specifically, the purpose of the incarnation.

[67] *civ.* 22.30.

[68] In book 11, Augustine explains how the two are related. See Maarten Wisse, 'Truth in Augustine, Plotinus, and Radical Orthodoxy: The Trinity in Outer Man', in Mathijs Lamberigts, Lieven Boeve and Terrence Merrigan, editors, *Orthodoxy, Process and Product* (Leuven: Peeters, 2009), 143–170.

Before we enter into this discussion, it is important to notice the implications of the overall Christological matrix for the interpretation of book 13, especially the quotation that forms the key to recent interpretations of *De Trinitate*:

> Our knowledge therefore is Christ, and our wisdom is the same Christ. It is he who plants faith in us about temporal things, he who presents us with the truth about eternal things. Through him we go straight toward him, through knowledge toward wisdom, without ever turning aside from one and the same Christ, *in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge* (Col 2:3). (13.24)

It is very tempting to use this quote to suggest a Christology of manifestation in Augustine, because here, as one of the few cases, the wisdom of the second Person of the Trinity, that is, the wisdom as the knowledge of eternal things, is closely linked to the wisdom of the incarnated Christ. Thus, it seems that here, God as God becomes revealed in the divine–human Person of Christ, so that the event of the incarnation as such, is the key to the restoration of our salvation in the sense that God becomes revealed in history.[69] Still, this is to take this quote entirely out of context. In terms of the overall soteriology and Christology that Augustine develops in *De Trinitate*, the only thing he wants to say is that the earthly Christ teaches us righteousness, and dies for our sins, in order to bring us back to the Christ as the wisdom of God. The divinity of Christ as such, however, does not bring us back. Christ provides forgiveness, purifies us and teaches us humility, so that we grow in our direct link to God – the topic of book 14.

The key thing that book 13 adds to what we have already seen is the discussion of the purpose of Christ's death. *Cur deus homo?* is not a question that originated only in Anselm; it is central to Augustine as well. Interestingly, Augustine is well aware of the problems of construing the purpose of the incarnation in terms of the death of Christ as a sacrifice. For example, he is aware of the internal Trinitarian conflict that might result from such a view of atonement:

> But what is this *justified in his blood* (Rom 5:9)? What, I want to know, is the potency of this blood, that believers should be justified in it? Is it really the case that when God the Father was angry with us he saw the death of his Son on our behalf, and was reconciled to us? Does this mean that then that his Son was already so reconciled to us that he was even prepared to die for us, while the Father was still so angry with us that unless the Son died for us he would not be reconciled to us? . . . But

[69] Thus Ayres, 'Christological Context', 111–139 and Hanby in his wake. See also Dodaro. The way for this reading was in fact paved by Rowan Williams and Basil Studer.

> if it comes to that, I observe that the Father loved us not merely before the Son died for us, but before he founded the world, . . . Thus the Father and the Son and the Spirit of them both work all things together and equally and in concord. (13.15)

So in fact, Radical Orthodoxy is right to insist that God did not need to be appeased, as this would result in a kind of internal conflict within the Trinity. Still the question remains why Christ had to die to justify sinners. This question is not so easily answered. At first, it seems Augustine gives a very peculiar explanation of this. In Augustine's view, so it seems, the death of Christ is a debt paid to the Devil, rather than to God. Through sin, the Devil got a legitimate right to the souls of sinners to take them captive. The death of Christ is then the liberation from the power of the Devil:

> What then is the justice that overpowered the Devil? The justice of Jesus Christ – what else? And how was he overpowered? He found nothing in him deserving of death and yet he killed him. It is therefore perfectly just that he should let the debtors he held go free, who believe in the one whom he killed without his being in his debt. This is how we are said to be justified in the blood of Christ. This is how that innocent blood was shed for the forgiveness of our sins. (13.18)

If we take a closer look at the role of the Devil, it turns out that the question of to whom the debt for the liberation of sinners is paid is a difficult one. It is paid to the Devil in the sense that without Christ's sacrifice the Devil continues to exert a claim on sinners because they have justly brought themselves under his dominion. On the other hand, the standards of justice by which the Devil is able to exert his claim are not the standards of the Devil, but God's. Hence, in a way, the debt is not paid to the Devil, but the debt is paid to God, as the Devil merely uses a possibility created by God's maintenance of the standards of justice. By paying the debt (to God), a legal possibility comes into existence, on the basis of which sinners can legally be liberated.

3.7. Reshuffling the Argument

Let us leave the question of to whom the debt is paid aside for a moment, taking a look at the whole of our analysis so far. We now face a whole amalgam of notions concerning the role of the incarnation in the restoration of salvation for human beings. From book 1, we took the key role of 'seeing God' as the exclusive right of the pure of heart, as the overall background against which Augustine's soteriology should be read. In line with this, in book 4, we found a double purpose of showing the love of God to enable people to return, and the teaching of humility to show us the way in which

to return. We found strong notions of the death of Christ as a sacrifice to enable our forgiveness of sins, also from book 4. From book 13, we have an explanation of forgiveness of sins as a debt paid to liberate sinners from captivity by Satan. Finally, we have an element that we did not discuss, the death of Christ as a reversal of the order between power and justice, as we find it in the context of book 13:

> But the Devil would have to be overcome not by God's power but by his justice. What, after all, could be more powerful than the all-powerful, or what creature's power could compare with the creator's? The essential flaw of the Devil's perversion made him a lover of power and a deserter and assailant of justice, which means that men imitate him all the more thoroughly the more they neglect or even detest justice and studiously devote themselves to power, rejoicing at the possession of it or inflamed with the desire for it. So it pleased God to deliver man from the Devil's authority by beating him at the justice game, not the power game, so that men too might imitate Christ by seeking to beat the Devil at the justice game, not the power game. Not that power is to be shunned as something bad, but that the right order must be preserved which puts justice first. (13.17)

As becomes clear from this quotation, the preference of justice over power from the side of God in the incarnation has its opposite at the anthropological level, where sin is the preferring power over justice.

Still, the overall picture of the role of the incarnation in restoring our salvation remains somewhat blurred, and it contains a number of elements that are highly problematic from a systematic point of view: the role of the Devil, the idea of a debt to be paid, and also the fact that the divinity of Christ seems in fact merely a guarantee of the righteousness of the man Jesus, but *not* the revelation of the being of God in time. This leads to the suggestion of a sort of defective Chalcedonian Christology, in which the divinity of Christ is indeed inseparably connected to his humanity, but whereby this connection is in fact not made use of in the account of the purpose of the incarnation.

Of course one may object that these are all typically twentieth-century problems of which Augustine had no idea. Apart from the fact that this is only partly true – he was at least aware of a problematic implication of the idea of a debt to be paid to God – I think we should take the systematic worries seriously at the level of a historical analysis too, in order to develop a historical interpretation of Augustine's theology that is as powerful as possible. A lack of systematic plausibility is often a sign of a weak historical interpretation because one has only part of the overall historical picture, and thus interprets these parts in a way that is alien to the original context. The view from the past will be more plausible for the present the stronger we make it from the perspective of its own context.

Hence, in the remainder of this section, I will reshuffle all the cards that we found until now, take a number of elements from other books of the *De Trinitate* and make an attempt to integrate the whole in a new way.

Let me start with God. In Augustine's conception, God as one who is perfectly good in essence – outside time, unchangeably – cannot but do the perfectly just in God's relationship to the world. God as perfectly merciful, which is by definition an attribute of God in relation to the world, cannot but be perfectly merciful. In addition, God in God's essence is always in perfect possession of everything, without any need for something from outside to be added to God's perfection, so the idea of God being in need of some sort of debt is impossible from the very outset. Thus, the 'need' for a debt to be paid can only be a way of expressing that in God's plan of bringing salvation to humanity, God will design a plan in which God's perfect mercy will be in perfect coherence with God's perfect justice. And all the works of the Trinity *ad extra* will be the works of Father, Son and Spirit inseparably. So the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit will design a plan in which each individually and conjointly unite the perfect coherence of justice and mercy to bring salvation to humanity.

Yes indeed, there the first price of twentieth-century theology will need to be paid: indeed for being able to forgive sinners, God will not be able to ignore the principles of God's perfect justice, and thus, a price will need to be paid. Interestingly, one could say that the alternative, to forgive without satisfaction, would be sin in terms of book 13, that is, it would be a case of using one's power while ignoring the principles of justice. It would be transgressing the laws that God ordered for the whole of creation. One may make this somewhat plausible if one takes the relationship between God's forgiveness and human forgiveness into account. What if God forgives my neighbour without paying the debt *my neighbour* has to me! What if God forgives someone who committed incest to his daughter? After all, the debt was a debt to the daughter. The price needs to be paid. God not only takes the relationship to the sinner seriously, but also the victims. This noble principle, however, has a sad disadvantage, as it means also to take the freedom of the sinner seriously. It means that if one freely decides to do evil, this needs to be respected, and the Devil is thus justly granted a right regarding the sinner.

From this perspective, it is clear why in Augustine – some say this is also the case in Anselm[70] – there is in fact no debt to be paid to God, as if God would be in need of something, but still a price needs to be paid to make forgiveness of sin possible. This also implies that it does not really matter that much whether the Devil is seen as a personal figure – notice that person is a typically modern category – or not. Augustine probably did, but we can follow his line of reasoning with regard to atonement also if we do not accept this.

[70] Georg Plasger, *Die Not-Wendigkeit der Gerechtigkeit. Eine Interpretation zu "Cur Deus homo" von Anselm von Canterbury* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1993).

Let us now turn to the anthropological perspective and see what can be said about the purpose of the incarnation in the light of the whole of what *De Trinitate* has to say about human beings. Human beings were created, as book 12 puts it – explicitly in contradistinction to the Platonic idea of the soul as participating in and thus 'remembering' God:

> The conclusion we should rather draw is that the nature of the intellectual mind has been so established by the disposition of its creator that it is subjoined to intelligible things in the order of nature, and so it sees such truths in a kind of non-bodily light that is *sui generis*, just as our eyes of flesh see all these things that lie around us in this bodily light, a light they were created to be receptive of and to match. (12.24)

This natural sensibility for God, as God is the highest Good, consisted in what the Heidelberg Catechism calls: 'true knowledge, righteousness, and holiness'.[71] Any view of God that is not embedded in doing the good *without exception* will fail miserably because it will no longer be able to know God as the absolute Good (book 8)! Knowing the absolute Good requires that we are absolutely just. With the favourite quote: 'Blessed are the pure of heart' – yes, Jesus knew logic too. Hence any sin that we commit is the death blow to our relationship with God. But it is the death blow to us too, as books 8–11 points out. The loss of justice destabilizes one's image of God, which, as the beginning of book 4 told us, causes anxiety, one's image of oneself, which forces one to seek stability in power play, pride, self-estimation, and nevertheless leaves one in a constant flow of unrest. Finally, the loss of justice destabilizes one's image of one's neighbour, leading to power play, copy and paste of oneself to another, disregard of the otherness of the other, love that takes the form of desire – desire as the negative side of love is in fact love in which power takes precedence over justice!

Now that we have this impression of what sin did to one's relationship to God, oneself and one's neighbour, we can see how the incarnation of the Son of God, his death on the cross restore our original *salus*. Jesus' death on the cross as a sacrifice for the sins of the world restores our view of God, as through the death of Christ, the being of God as love, who forgives sinners on the basis of justice, becomes evident again. Thus, we combine the first purpose of the incarnation according to book 4 and the reversal of the hierarchy of power and justice from book 13. Thereby, our anxiety is cured because we are able to see the true nature of God, in which mercy and justice can go together, for which reason we dare to return to our heavenly Father without fear. Our return to God in Christ begins to reorient our will, liberating it, teaching us the way in which Christ is the just man, the way of humility – the second purpose of the incarnation from book 4. Finally, Christ as the just man who

[71] *Heidelberg Catechism*, q. 6.

dies for our sins, teaches us the love of our neighbour, preferring justice over power, the communion of saints which is the *Christus totus*. The more we grow in our image of Christ, the better we will know God as the supreme Good; the more we will grow in loving our neighbour, the better we will know God who is love (book 8), that is, God in whom mercy and justice are in perfect harmony.

Looking back at one of the main twentieth-century objections, namely, the objection to Augustine's Christology as one in which the being of God is not really revealed,[72] we are now in a position to see this in a new light. Indeed, in Augustine, the incarnation is not a definitive event in the life of God. The incarnation is an accidental relation of God to humanity (book 5). In addition, as we have seen from book 1, the *humanity* of Christ is mediating God to humanity; the divinity of Christ is not ontologically mediated to the world in the incarnation.[73] Still it is the humanity of Jesus, his teaching of justice, his acts of love to sinners, his death on the cross, and so on that show us the true being of God as love and deliver us from our false images of what God is. The typically twentieth-century question: 'how can an absolutely changeless and self-sufficient God reveal his true being?' is answered by Augustine as follows: the eternal character of God as love will become evident in salvation history, where God's actions towards the world will show the eternal character of God according to the mode of God's contingent actions.[74]

Finally, it is now also clear why book 13 fulfils the role that it does in the second half of the *De Trinitate*, namely, to provide an image of the Trinity in man at the level of science, that is, at the level of the inner man, but in its direction to the material world. Christ as a human being and thus as part of the material world cures our inner self in its relationship to God, itself and its fellow humans, and thus restores the image of God as it had been damaged by sin. Seen from this perspective, the restoration of the image of God at the level of *scientia* is really indispensable to the restoration of the image of God at the level of *sapientia*, the topic of book 14, although the unity of the person of Christ does *not* make the *sapientia* of Christ as God visible at the level of *scientia*.[75] Christ is both our *scientia* and *sapientia* in that he restores our salvation, which resides in loving God above all, and our neighbour as ourselves.

[72] The idea here is that for twentieth-century theology, God needs to be defined by God's becoming human in Jesus Christ, which is not the case in Augustine.

[73] Interestingly, I agree here with Barnes, although our arguments for this thesis differ considerably. See Barnes, 'Visible Christ and Invisible Trinity', 329–355.

[74] A helpful illustration of how this is possible is offered by Augustine in book 9.11, where he discusses the case of meeting a martyr that one loves because of his endurance, but turns out to be a deceiver. The norm on the basis of which one approaches the martyr remains the same, although the relation to him changes.

[75] Contra Hanby, *Augustine and Modernity*, 55–68, who follows Ayres, 'Christological Context', 111–139.

3.8. A Comparison: Milbank versus Augustine

If we finally compare the moral Christology that we found in Augustine with the Christology of manifestation of Radical Orthodoxy, we in fact compare two different Christological paradigms, two different worlds. They are not only two different worlds in the sense of containing different ideas, but also two different spiritual worlds. The one is a world in which it seems only important to know, to have the right view of how the world is related to God. From this right view of the world and God, then, flows a politics of what we have to do in order to let the world be according to its very essence of a unity in difference. We can know this truth even if our life is not in accordance with it. Beauty, eros, love, a dazzling intellectual dynamics is said to be our source of joy and happiness. The other world is one of fear and trembling, one in which intellectual attempts to unravel the ontological structure of God and world will be dealt with in a very sceptical if not sharply negative way. Knowing God is no intellectual achievement; it is the eschatological destiny of the pure of heart, paving their way with humility and putting their trust in Christ.

The difference is not only spiritual; it also appears in the doctrinal development of the two Christologies. In this regard, there is an ironical difference between the way twentieth-century Christology dealt with traditional (Chalcedonian) Christology, and the way the (proto-)Chalcedonians did themselves. Modern Christology has blamed traditional two-nature Christology for being speculative, rooted in Greek substance ontology and whatever other objections have been raised. Still, what we have seen in Augustine is in fact very little interest in what we nowadays tend to call Christology: no speculation about the relationship between the two natures of Christ,[76] only the *sine ulla confusione* and the affirmation that the Son of God became man in one person – the Chalcedonian creed in a nutshell indeed.

Insofar as we obtained indications of the relationship between the two natures in Christ in Augustine, we saw a remarkable feature of Augustine's Christology. Although for the soteriological significance of the incarnation, Augustine needs a proto-Chalcedonian Christology, that is, Christ must be *vere Deus* and *vere homo* without separation and confusion, Augustine does *not* use the notion of the incarnation to mediate the being of God to humanity; only Christ as man is the mediator between God and humanity. Such a mediation is impossible to Augustine. As we have seen, this is not so much the case because of a Greek *finitum non capax infiniti* maxim, as that maxim has already been violated in his doctrine of creation and in his affirmation of the inseparable unity of God and man in Christ. Rather, this impossibility of crossing the boundary between God and man in Christ is motivated by the Pauline/Old Testament fear for the Lord and the conviction that seeing God in a sinful state will kill the sinner.

[76] See, for example, book 4.31.

A radical consequence flows from this for all those who read Augustine's theology as a sort of 'incarnational' theology, where the ontological structure of the universe mirrors the relationship between the two natures of Christ, the infinite becoming visible in the material world. In Augustine, the relationship between God and the world is *not* an incarnational relationship. This, it seems to me, has also very serious consequences for the way in which twentieth-century research has read Augustine's theory of language, although it is not the place here to argue for that.

Given the minimal attention to reconstructing the divine–human person of Christ, in a sense, the twentieth-century critique of and interest in – we find both quite prominently in twentieth-century theology – is indeed a bit ironical. Those criticizing the tradition of two-nature Christology because it was too much rooted in an attempt to reconstruct the person of Christ in terms of a substance ontology not only missed the point, but fell into a trap that Chalcedon avoided, namely, into the trap to indeed look for a reconstruction of Christ's person as the final aim of Christology. In fact, indeed ironically, the Fathers of the Church were much *less* interested in a metaphysical concept of God and Christ than those twentieth-century theologians and philosophers who are so eager to criticize them. For them, the mediatory function of Christ was on a totally different level.

The advocates of a version of a Chalcedonian Christology, those twentieth-century theologians that seek to define the whole of Christian theology in terms of the relationship between God and humanity in Christ – Radical Orthodoxy is by far not alone in doing this – fall into the exact same trap. They mostly see the promise of a Chalcedonian Christology in providing a sort of incarnational and mostly Hegelian dialectics between God and the world, whereas, in fact, the creed was intended to keep the two apart as far as ontology was concerned, and keep them together as far as the concrete historical man Jesus Christ was concerned. Thus, rather than falling into the trap of a substance ontology, Nestorianism or whatever awful heresies alike, a minimal Christology in the sense of Chalcedon draws a set of boundaries within which the concreteness, uniqueness and historicity of the incarnation get their proper place.

4

ANTHROPOLOGY

4.1. Introduction

So far, we dealt almost exclusively with the first half of the *De Trinitate*. In this chapter we will make the turn towards the second half. If the first half is already the topic of an intense debate among scholars, this is all the more true of the second half. The so-called psychological analogies of the second half have attracted very diverse attention. Philosophers have found the traces of modern subjectivity theory in it, whereas the famous German interpreter of *De Trinitate*, Schmaus, found in it a psychological doctrine of the Trinity. 'Speculation' is a word that occurs frequently when speaking about the second half of *De Trinitate*. Of course, such a term might indicate as well a difficulty in making sense of the argument on the part of the interpreter as much as saying something about the text as such. Still, it can hardly be denied that books 8–10 contain quite a high level of intellectual craftmanship, of which it is not always clear how it contributes to Augustine's overall argument.

As Augustine himself suggests, at least on the surface of his argument, he searches for traces of the Trinity in the created order and beyond these traces for an 'image' of the Trinity. One of the difficulties, however, is that much of the argument seems to fall outside of a strict search for Trinitarian analogies. At least this is one's impression when going through the texts.

My argument in this chapter will be that the second half of the *De Trinitate* provides an anthropology and soteriology in one coherent argument, both of which are carefully embedded in a rhetorical attempt to convince the readership of the truth of the ideas being developed. The upshot is a Trinitarian anthropology rather than a psychological doctrine of the Trinity, but still an anthropology that, if we follow its argument from beginning to end, will help us to find our way back to the Trinity from which we ourselves turned through sin.

My argument will include the following steps: in the next section, I will take a look at a few ways of reading the second half of *De Trinitate*. Since I have already discussed theological readings of the second half already in previous chapters, I will focus on philosophical readings in this chapter. In

section 4.3, I will provide a brief sketch of the multilayered reading that will follow in subsequent sections and chapters. Subsequently, I will turn to a close reading of books 8–10. In section 4.7, I will build a bridge between the historical analysis of the argument in books 8–10, and the systematic-theological discussion in the last section of this chapter. In this transitional section, I will sketch the implications of Augustine's argument for contemporary theological anthropology. My thesis will be that the sort of anthropology and soteriology that Augustine develops in these books offers us a strong alternative to contemporary ways of developing anthropology. We will show that this is true in the last section, where I will contrast Augustine's Trinitarian way of construing anthropology with Wolfhart Pannenberg's binary anthropology.

4.2. The Second Half among the Philosophers

Although there is considerable debate concerning the first half of *De Trinitate*, it seems that the real divide circles around the second half rather than the first. This is especially true of the divide between philosophical and theological readings. Even some publications of Augustine's own text in translation restrict themselves to those books that are 'philosophically interesting'.[1] These are mostly restricted to books 5–7, because of the play with Aristotelian categories, and books 8 to 15, because of the theory of self-consciousness that is allegedly developed in them. In the sections dealing with secondary literature in previous chapters, I have already paid extensive attention to the other side of the spectrum, that is, the more exclusively theological readings of *De Trinitate*. Some of these readings clearly have difficulties with the more philosophical parts of the work. In this section, I will pay special attention to two recent full-scale interpretations that have addressed the philosophical aspects.

Before we address such analyses, it might be good to deal with the question of the relationship between philosophy and theology in general. As Kany, for example, has rightly noticed, Augustine's work escapes a simple division between philosophy and theology as we have known it since the Enlightenment. It even seems that Kany would opt for a reading of Augustine's work that contributes to undoing this division.[2] Although it is true that Augustine did not know of the distinction between philosophy and theology as we have it nowadays, I have argued in Chapter 1 that Augustine's theology still shows

[1] Aurelius Augustinus, *De Trinitate: Lateinisch Deutsch: Bücher VIII–XI, XIV–XV, Anhang: Buch V* (trans. Johann Kreuzer; Philosophische Bibliothek 523; Hamburg: Meiner, 2003); Augustine, *On the Trinity, Books 8–15* (ed. Gareth B. Matthews; trans. Stephen McKenna; Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

[2] Kany, *Augustins Trinitätsdenken*, 408, 508, 530–534.

a sensitivity to the difference between the arguments that are valid within the pagan wisdom of his time and the role of reason embedded within the Christian faith.

Notwithstanding this distinction between lines of reasoning which is valid in pagan philosophical thought on the one hand and Christian speech about God on the other, the two discourses do not remain separate in Augustine's theology; quite to the contrary. Before entering into a more in-depth discussion with Kany and Brachtendorf, I would like to stress from the outset that I think that the two perspectives belong together in Augustine's theology, and for specific theological reasons.

Augustine's theology is characterized by a constant drive from concerns within the context of faith to the outside, to those who do not entirely or wholeheartedly accept the truth of Christianity. The possibility of this drive towards those not yet accepting the truth of Christianity is not merely formally apologetic, as an attempt to make everyone a Christian. The possibility of doing so is rooted in the relationship between Augustine's theology of creation and his theology of redemption. The redemption that Christ brings to the world is not something completely alien to our createdness in the world, as a sort of foreign corpus of revelation that enters our world and tells us the truth about God. Quite to the contrary, the Christ event responds to our 'natural condition' as a step towards the restoration of the relationship between God and human beings, and thus it appeals to what human beings can naturally grasp. Due to sin, the capability of human beings to see the truth, or, more importantly, to do it, is defective, but this does not mean that it is destroyed or no longer present. Thus, we see in Augustine's theology a constant attempt to reactivate natural sensibilities for the divine, a sensibility that is, as I have argued in Chapter 3, not mediated by Christ but is a gift of creation.

Thus, one might say with another clearly anachronistic term, that there is room for 'natural theology' in Augustine, and this warrants those aspects of his work that especially attract the attention of philosophical readers. Still, I would say, in order to properly understand those aspects of Augustine's work, one always needs to place those aspects within their proper theological context, otherwise one runs the risk of turning Augustine into a pagan philosopher, for whom human beings' turn to God is possible independent of the Church, Scripture and grace. As I have argued in Chapter 1, it is exactly against such an independent search for God that Augustine's 'pen is on the watch' in *De Trinitate*.

4.2.1. Roland Kany

A discussion of Kany's *magnum opus* among the philosophers is formally incorrect because Kany teaches patristics at the University of Munich, but it is justified because of his strong interest in the philosophical aspects of *De Trinitate* found at the end of the book.

Kany's final chapter, in which he presents his own synthesizing reading of *De Trinitate*, bears a title whose full implications will not be revealed to readers who are not fully conversant in today's German-speaking theological and philosophical world. It is titled 'Augustine's original insight' (*Augustins ursprüngliche Einsicht*). To German theologians and philosophers, this title immediately reminds one of a not too recent essay: Dieter Henrich's *Fichte ursprüngliche Einsicht*, originally published in a Festschrift for Wolfgang Cramer, but published separately a year later.[3] Recalling Dieter Henrich's reading of Fichte, Kany presents Augustine's original insight as foreshadowing Fichte's most important insight. Kany is not the first one to suggest this. In fact, his argument builds on earlier attempts to align Augustine's *De Trinitate* to German Idealist philosophy, and more recently to Johannes Brachtendorf's philosophical reading of the text. I will start with Kany's more recent book and deal with Brachtendorf afterwards, because Kany's thesis is much more outspoken than Brachtendorf's and brings out the contemporary use of Augustine's theology within the German-speaking world more easily than Brachtendorf's more modest and historically sensitive reading of Augustine.

It might help to contextualize German interest in Henrich's book in order to get a sharper view of how Kany's reading of Augustine fits into the contemporary German theological and philosophical context. Similar to the situation in many other Western countries, the German theological landscape is characterized by the decreased influence of faith and Church on an increasingly secular society. A secular worldview seems to be able to stand on its own feet, without any necessary role for God in human life. Especially on the Protestant side, the split between a secular worldview and the world of faith seemed to be reinforced by the strong influence exerted by Karl Barth's theology of revelation. Theologies that sought to benefit from resources outside of Scripture and Church were long suspected to be forms of 'natural theology'. As a countermovement to this revulsion against natural theology, an increasing number of theologians began to reinvestigate connections between faith and culture, and, insofar as philosophy is a part of culture, the relationship between faith and reason. This reinforced and still reinforces a new interest in German Idealism as a way to integrate faith and reason.

As is well known within the Anglo-Saxon theological world, the effects of Idealism – as the highpoint of the Enlightenment period – on religion need to be delicately balanced. Among Anglo-Saxon theologians, it is more a rule than

[3] Dieter Henrich, *Fichtes ursprüngliche Einsicht* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1967). An English translation is available in Dieter Henrich, 'Fichte's Original Insight', *Contemporary German Philosophy* 1 (1982), 15–52. It is more or less surprising to see how many German scholars refer to *Fichte's Original Insight* to argue for a theory of limited reason (*begrenzte Vernunft*). Apart from being very brief, Henrich's article is indeed a very creative reconstruction of Fichte's thought but, as Henrich himself admits, not very easy to substantiate historically.

an exception to portray the Enlightenment as the ultimate danger to Christian faith. In the German context, however, this is by far not the case. There, subtle distinctions dominate the discussion between forms of Enlightenment thought that can be put in service of faith and other forms that may involve a risk to faith. A good example is Joseph Ratzinger's critique of the Enlightenment, where he advocates a balance between a reason that remains independent from God and the Church and a form of reason that serves the faith.[4]

It is precisely at this point that Fichte's contribution to German Idealism plays its role in German-speaking theology. Dieter Henrich holds that Fichte's original insight is that the subject's identity with its awareness of itself, that is, self-consciousness, is not grounded in the subject itself, but in an identity that is prior to the subject's act of self-consciousness. Thus, the self is not self-constituting in Fichte, but rather depends on an identity that precedes it.[5] This, in the end, is the identity of the self in the Absolute, and, as one might expect, theologians take up this argument to suggest that the constitution of the self is grounded in God. This leads to what is called a view of reason as limited and finite (*begrenzte Vernunft*). Human subjectivity and reason is not self-constituting; rather, it is always dependent on something higher than itself because its ontological constitution precedes and escapes its own discursive knowledge.[6]

In Chapter 1, I already touched upon Kany's insistence on blurring the distinction between philosophy and theology, and it will not surprise one to see Kany argue for Augustine's original insight as the fact that we have self-consciousness, and we have it by nature, but we have it only in a finite way, and thus our acts of self-consciousness are ultimately grounded in God as the infinite ground of our subjectivity. This, according to Kany, is what Augustine develops in the second half of *De Trinitate*. In Kany's view, the centre of Augustine's argument is book 10, where self-consciousness is analysed. Books 8–9 lead to this, and books 11–15 elaborate on this insight.

As we will see, Kany is quite close to Brachtendorf in this reading of the second half of *De Trinitate*. However, Kany's reading of the second half is connected to his reading of the first half in a way different from Brachtendorf's. Kany reads the second half as a comprehensible counterpart to an incomprehensible concept of God in the first:

> Augustine could have finished *De Trinitate* with Book Seven. Not even the most elaborate doctrine of the Trinity, that of the Cappadocians, had, according to him, been in the position to answer the simple question of

[4] See, for example, Benedict XVI, *Faith, Reason and the University: Memories and Reflections [Regensburg Lecture]* (Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2006), URL: www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2006/september/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20060912_university-regensburg_en.html.

[5] Henrich, 'Fichte's Original Insight', 40–41.

[6] For a similar argument, but based on Schelling and directed against Hegel, see Wendte, *Gottmenschliche Einheit bei Hegel*, 317–320.

> 'what three' – in the sense of kind, sort or individual – are at stake in the doctrine of the Trinity. Therefore, Augustine could have finished his work here with the conclusion that God's mystery remains incomprehensible. He would certainly have received support for this from others, and without doubt, his conclusion would have been right. . . . However, the historical Augustine does not take his task so lightly. . . . Although since 396, Augustine's doctrine of grace shows a certain affinity to the idea of the complete disintegration of reason in God and human beings, Augustine does not admit for this consequence in the doctrine of the Trinity. . . . Rather, Augustine's faith seeks for a certain access to the Trinity in human thought through understanding.[7]

After having announced this search for understanding, Kany reconstructs Augustine's line of argument in 12 steps, starting with a discussion of book 8 and proceeding towards book 10, in which he sees the decisive insight reached. The line of reasoning towards it, Kany sees 'in modern terms', as a transcendental analysis,[8] asking for the conditions of possibility of the faith. For Kany, the culmination of this analysis is Augustine's remark about the classic adage 'Know yourself!' Everyone is present to himself, so Augustine argues, and thus thinking of oneself must be something different from knowing oneself. After quoting this passage, Kany continues:

> A surprising discovery is hidden in this observation that one easily overlooks. Augustine distinguishes the necessary presence to oneself, the 'knowing oneself' as *se nosse* from the conscious, discursive 'thinking (of) oneself' as *se cogitare*. When the spirit thinks of itself, it can make true or false perceptions of itself, like one can have false or right perceptions of certain objects. But in thinking of oneself, the knowing oneself is always already presupposed as the condition for its possibility. This knowing oneself is immediate and primary. Nothing is lacking here, because more than the insight that it is me who is the target of the maxim 'Know yourself', is not necessary for me to know. Nor is this immediate knowledge of oneself an intentional knowing of an object. It is complete, total and identical to itself; it does not increase or decrease; it only disappears when the spirit extinguishes. It is close to what is called self-consciousness in modernity.[9]

This self-knowledge is the image of the Trinity, as it is a trinity in itself:

> In the presence to oneself, the knowing subject, the thing known and knowing oneself are together in a complete, pure and unseparated

[7] Kany, *Augustins Trinitätsdenken,* 508, my translation.
[8] Kany, *Augustins Trinitätsdenken,* 510.
[9] Kany, *Augustins Trinitätsdenken,* 516, my translation.

> unity. At this point, there is yet no separation, which would be necessary for the knowledge of objects, and still this presence to oneself is the condition for the possibility of diremption from original unity. The presence to oneself is the necessary condition for the triad between the knower, the known and the knowledge, but in one's presence to oneself the difference of threeness and oneness is not yet unfolded. . . . In the inner presence of the spirit to itself, the human being is trinity. If one adds the biblical faith to this, according to which this human being is the image of God, one may conclude that human beings are the image of God in this trinitarian presence to themselves.[10]

Unlike another well-known interpreter of Augustine in Germany, Kurt Flasch,[11] Kany sees a clear difference between Augustine's original insight and Plotinus' view of self-consciousness, a difference that justifies the statement that Augustine solved the riddle of Greek thought:

> Plotinus, however, does not grasp the significance of the non-discursive presence to oneself. He does neither attribute thinking self-consciousness to the One nor in full scope to human beings, but to the divine *Nous* and in a partial way also to human beings. In this way, he misses the point of the absoluteness and fruitfulness of the structure of the *se nosse*. He fails to see the possibility to find in it the absolute anchorpoint which the whole Greek philosophical enterprise was striving for. This structure of self-consciousness namely, in its immediate primary necessity, seems to precede the difference between oneness and multiplicity and that between subject and object. It is the point of absolute oneness that can only be grasped indirectly as the presupposition of thinking and being that, at the same time, already contains in it the impulse towards multiplicity.[12]

One easily notices Kany's *Entdeckerfreude* in seeing how Augustine's theory of self-consciousness foreshadows Fichte's insight into the structure of self-consciousness and solves the riddle of almost the whole of Hellenistic thought.

The question is, of course, whether this original insight is what Augustine wants us to see as the central issue to be dealt with in the second half of *De Trinitate*. I think he does not, and he gives us quite a few hints that this is the case. These hints even become apparent to a certain extent in Kany's text. Although Kany presents Augustine's original insight in 12 sequential steps, steps 2 to 7 are hard to see as contributing to the question of self-consciousness that Kany construes as the culminating point of the argument

[10] Kany, *Augustins Trinitätsdenken,* 517–518, my translation.
[11] Flasch, *Augustin: Einführung in sein Denken*, 338, 342.
[12] Kany, *Augustins Trinitätsdenken,* 517, my translation.

in the second half. This has to do with the fact that in these steps Kany tries to summarize what happens in books 8 and 9, and much of these books do not deal with the issue of self-knowledge or self-consciousness. The same is true of many of the books that follow book 10, something that Kany admits himself:

> Augustine does not elaborate the structure of presence to oneself any further, almost as if he hesitated about the scope of what he discovered. Instead, in Book Twelve, he rashly moves the investigation towards three concretisations, the triad of *memoria, intelligentia, voluntas*. He does so without a compelling argumentation and possibly enters into problems similar to those with the triad of *mens, notitia, amor*. With the triad of *memoria, intelligentia, voluntas*, he summarizes the investigations of Books Eight to Ten on the one hand, but also misses their depth of insight on the other, because in this triad the objectification of the spirit re-enters the scene, an objectification that was basically overcome in Book Ten.[13]

Expressions of disappointment about the fact that Augustine did not see what moments of original insight are present in his own work are not uncommon among scholars of Augustine, especially of *De Trinitate*. Theologians make such statements when they appear disappointed over Augustine's lack of attention to the history of salvation (Studer),[14] or over his remaining roots in Platonic dualism (Williams).[15] Philosophers make them when they notice Augustine's distantiation from the Platonic tradition (Beierwaltes).[16] I will argue, below, why I think that Kany's expression of disappointment highlights the fact that he misses important aspects of what Augustine himself sees as his original insights, and, thus, listens to himself rather than to Augustine.

4.2.2. Johannes Brachtendorf

Kany's argument is the most recent one in a longer tradition of those who try to read *De Trinitate* with an eye to drawing insight from it for the development of a metaphysics of spirit (*Geistesmetaphysik*). A few years earlier, Johannes Brachtendorf had provided a philosophical reading of *De Trinitate* in a Habilitation at the University of Tübingen, which was published in 2000. In this book, Brachtendorf defends a thesis similar to Kany's, but Brachtendorf, who wrote a dissertation on Fichte [*sic*!], seems to be much more careful

[13] Kany, *Augustins Trinitätsdenken,* 519, my translation.
[14] See Chapter 3, section 3.3.1.
[15] See Chapter 2, section 2.5.1.
[16] Werner Beierwaltes, *Identität und Differenz* (Philosophische Abhandlungen 49; Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1980), 57.

than Kany in construing Augustine's notion of self-consciousness as a Fichtian original insight.[17]

Like Kany, and Kany mentions Booth and Dahl as precursors of this reading, Brachtendorf stresses the idea that the *imago Dei* is not something that can be lost, but is the structure of self-knowledge in the mind, and thus is the fundamental character of a human being:

> When Augustine's thesis is taken seriously, that the human spirit has always already been image of God and has therefore always already been structured in a trinitarian way, then one should be able to find this structure in an analysis of the essence of the spirit, and this should be the case independent from the question of whether one is willing to see an image of God in this structure or not.[18]

Brachtendorf's reading of *De Trinitate* differs from Kany's in several respects, though. First, Brachtendorf sees a much stronger parallel between the way God is and the way the human spirit is structured. In Kany, the structure of the finite spirit that is argued for in the second part of *De Trinitate* is a response to the incomprehensibility of God that Augustine construed in the first part. Brachtendorf does not pay much attention to the aporia to which the first half of *De Trinitate* leads. Quite to the contrary, sometimes it seems that he sees no aporia at all. Therefore, Brachtendorf tends to construe a strong parallel between the conceptual structure of God as Trinity, on the one hand, and the conceptual structure of self-relatedness, on the other.[19] In this area, Brachtendorf does not see, as Kany tends to, a strong distinction between the notion of self-knowledge or self-consciousness in book 10 and the other triadic concepts in books 8, 9 and 11:

> The human spirit displays the same structural marks as the divine Trinity – as is argued in book 9 – namely independence, equality, unity and the relational difference of its parts. However, God is an infinite being, whereas the human spirit is a finite. Because of his infinity, in God, the threeness is the oneness at the same time. The human spirit, however, achieves its trinitarian attributes in another way. In all of his analyses, Augustine construes the *mens* as grounded in its character as self-relatedness. All structural marks of *mens* follow from this basic character. The specificity of *notitia* and *amor* becomes clear from the self-reference of knowledge and love, which come to expression in

[17] Brachtendorf, *Struktur des menschlichen Geistes*, 180.

[18] Brachtendorf, *Struktur des menschlichen Geistes*, 9, my translation.

[19] At other moments, it seems he notices that Augustine 'breaks the logic of language', but then, this happens in the logic of speech about the human spirit too, cf. Brachtendorf, *Struktur des menschlichen Geistes*, 78.

> corresponding *ad se*-statements. The equality of the three moments in *mens* takes place when the *mens* grasps itself fully, knowingly and lovingly. The unity follows from a full mutual permeation of all parts; the relational difference becomes clear in the genetic analysis of self-knowledge. Relatedness to self is therefore the way in which a finite, spiritual being displays the ontological features of an infinite God.[20]

Still, Brachtendorf recognizes a strong difference between the true image of God in self-relatedness (*Selbstbezüglichkeit*) and the other triadic relations, but he does not locate these at the level of the parallel between God as Trinity and human beings. Rather, Brachtendorf takes this difference into account at the level of the notion of the vision of God. In book 8, he argues, Augustine does not even make an attempt to reach the actual vision of God:

> Indeed, Augustine does not make the relational aspect of the intelligible reality '*amor*' fruitful for understanding the internal trinitarian relations at all. It is only the relation of God to one's neighbour in which the relationality of loved love shows itself. A vision of the triune God, as Augustine announced, does not take place here at all.[21]

Book 9, then, does not aim at the actual vision of God either, since it stops at the level of the vision of the human mind as an image or a mirror of the way God as Trinity is:

> The human spirit is the place where that which is sought can be found. The ascent should lead up to this point, but it cannot go beyond it, insofar as the knowledge of the Trinity is the aim, and it does not need to go beyond it, because the analysis of '*mens*' will give sufficient access to the understanding of the Trinity.[22]

Thus, in Brachtendorf as much as in Kany, books 8–9 are seen as preambula to the real thing, immediate self-consciousness, as it is developed in book 10:

> Books 9 and 10 intend to point out a trinitarian structure in the human spirit that matches that of the divine Trinity. Book 9 delivers a provisional version of this structure in the terms '*mens – amor sui – notitia sui*', but this version will turn out to be found wanting because it does not fully capture the essence of the '*mens humana*'. Only in book 10

[20] Johannes Brachtendorf, 'Der menschliche Geist als Bild des trinitarischen Gottes – Ähnlichkeiten und Unähnlichkeiten', in Brachtendorf, *Gott und sein Bild*, 161, my translation.
[21] Brachtendorf, *Struktur des menschlichen Geistes*, 103, my translation.
[22] Brachtendorf, *Struktur des menschlichen Geistes*, 105, my translation.

> will the foundation of human subjectivity be described by the triad '*memoria – voluntas – intelligentia*'.[23]

Typical of Brachtendorf's reading of the second half is a reduplication of the image of God, as we see in this passage:

> Fundamentally, it should be retained that the foolish soul is also image of God, namely on the basis of its stable relation to itself. Every renewal and moral improvement involves a change in the soul and therefore, it has to be on another level than the original relation of the spirit to itself. Therefore, the renewal of the image cannot mean that the spirit, rather than remembering, thinking and loving itself, would think of God and love God, for example because in his relation to himself, his sinful self-centeredness is at stake, which has to be broken up and transformed into a relation to God.[24]

In this way, Brachtendorf tries to reconcile his thesis that the image of God is already completely present in the human mind, on the one hand, with Augustine's primarily theological discourse in books 11–14, on the other, where Augustine deals with the restoration and perfection of the image of God. The dynamic aspects of the image of God, Brachtendorf holds, should be located at the level of the moral perfection of the believer, whereas the stable inalienable image is located at the level of self-consciousness, a notion that Brachtendorf seems to identify with the triad of *memoria, intelligentia* and *voluntas*.[25]

A similar difficulty appears in book 15, where it seems that Augustine withdraws what he has argued in book 10, namely, that there is a structural parallel between the conceptual structure of the Trinity and the structure of the human spirit. Therefore, Brachtendorf deals extensively with book 15 in order to maintain his thesis of a real parallel between the Trinity in God and in the human spirit.

> The human spirit is an image of the triune God, because like the triune God, it displays the structural marks of a trinity. Augustine certainly does not withdraw this theory of an image in book 15 of *De Trinitate*. Rather, he points out once more where the trinitarian structure of the spirit has to be found, namely in the relation of the *mens humana* to itself, which guarantees the identity that is presupposed in every external act of a being gifted with self-consciousness. At the same time, Augustine emphasizes once more the differences between God and

[23] Brachtendorf, *Struktur des menschlichen Geistes*, 118, my translation.
[24] Brachtendorf, 'Der menschliche Geist als Bild', 166, my translation.
[25] Brachtendorf, *Struktur des menschlichen Geistes*, 181, 213–215.

> human beings, differences that already have been generally marked by the concept of the image, because an image is not identical to the original, however great a similarity there is between them. According to Augustine, God and human beings are basically separated by the difference between creator and creature. A divinization of the human spirit is therefore excluded from the very beginning.[26]

4.2.3. Evaluation of Kany and Brachtendorf

In spite of all the valuable insights that Brachtendorf's and Kany's studies have to offer on *De Trinitate*, their basic problem seems to be an emphasis on the work's philosophical aspects at the cost of its theological aspects. Surprisingly, given Kany's own argument in the last chapter, Kany himself is completely aware of the risk of these philosophical readings when he reviews Brachtendorf's monograph, commenting also on Christoph Horn's review of it:

> To both interpreters, Brachtendorf as much as Horn, one could ask the question of how their readings are to be reconciled with Augustine's elaborate treatments of the necessity of the divine missions and of the Saviour. Why does Augustine suggest of Platonism that it sees the homeland from afar but does not manage to reach it, whereas the believer grabs hold of the wood of the cross in the sea of life, and armed with it, rows to this faraway place.[27]

Surprisingly, Kany's own reading of the second half falls into exactly the same trap, and, as far as I can see, even more so than Brachtendorf's. For example, in his excitement over Augustine's alleged original insight, Kany wonders why Augustine failed to reflect on the divine origin of the soul, and he claims that it is at this point that later thinkers such as Dietrich von Freiberg and Meister Eckhart elaborated on Augustine's insight into the nature of self-consciousness:

> It is all the more striking that Augustine almost passes over the question of the possible identity between the self-conscious finite spirit and the divine Spirit. Medieval readers of Augustine such as Dietrich von Freiberg and Meister Eckhart will pursue this question.[28]

The reason why Augustine does not reflect on this, and I would say rejects it, seems completely obvious to me. It is precisely against the divine nature of the

[26] Brachtendorf, 'Der menschliche Geist als Bild', 170, my translation.
[27] Kany, *Augustins Trinitätsdenken,* 518, my translation.
[28] Kany, *Augustins Trinitätsdenken,* 518, my translation.

soul that Augustine's pen guards against in the work as a whole, as we have shown in Chapter 1. If the identity between the human and the divine spirit is the Fichtian reading, and I think it is, then this is all the more reason to take a closer look at it, since such an identity would result in a hard contradiction between the argument made in books 1 and 10.

Let me point to what I see as the most important problems in the Fichtian reading of *De Trinitate*. The primary problem, it seems to me, is that Augustine does not suggest a trinity in self-knowledge at all in *De Trinitate*. Insofar as book 10 deals with the certainty of self-knowledge, it still relies on the triad of *mens, amor* and *notitia sui*, and insofar as it deals with a new triad, this triad is that of *memoria, intelligentia* and *voluntas*. The latter is in fact postponed to book 11 for elaborate treatment, so that one might say that book 10 has no triad of its own, and certainly not one of knower, known and knowledge, as Kany suggests.[29] Brachtendorf solves the problem of a lacking triad of self-knowledge by identifying the certainty of self-knowledge with that of *memoria, intelligentia* and *voluntas*. Thus, both Brachtendorf and Kany turn something into the kernel of Augustine's argument that has no independent role, at least not in the sense of being presented as an 'image' of the Trinity.

The second issue I would like to bring to the fore is the difference between Augustine's distinction of *se nosse* and *se cogitare*, on the one hand, and Fichte's account of self-consciousness, on the other. Fichte intends, with his account of self-consciousness, to provide the basis for an Enlightenment foundationalist philosophy, a system of *Letztbegründung*, where the intentional constitution of the I in an act of self-consciousness is said to be rooted in a non-intentional self-awareness that precedes, grounds and transcends it.

As Brachtendorf has already pointed out, the intention of providing a *Letztbegründung* for a philosophical account of the self goes far beyond Augustine's intention.[30] More precisely formulated, it goes against Augustine's explicit intention concerning the work as a whole because this sort of *Letztbegründung* would declare the I divine and thus render a creator-God beyond the world superfluous.

More should be said, however, because it is not simply this aspect of foundationalist philosophy that differs between Augustine and Fichte. The question is whether Augustine's *se nosse* can be paralleled to Fichte's non-intentional self-awareness. Various aspects of Augustine's account of the distinction between *se nosse* and *se cogitare* point to the differences between these concepts.

First of all, in Fichte, the distinction between intentional self-consciousness and non-intentional self-awareness is an ontological distinction and, therefore, one is never able to nor should one attempt to overcome this difference. The Fichtian 'Attend to yourself' (*Bemerke dich selbst*) is

[29] Kany, *Augustins Trinitätsdenken,* 517–518.
[30] Brachtendorf, *Struktur des menschlichen Geistes*, 180–181.

intended to realize an ontological state of affairs that, as such, can never be accessed by the human mind. The intention is not to get rid of the difference between the intentional act of self-consciousness and the fact of self-identity that constitutes it, but to realize the absoluteness of its grounding and, therefore, to acknowledge the solid foundation underlying the intentional act of self-consciousness. The fact of self-identity that constitutes the I is an ontological fact, not a matter of epistemology. The epistemological aspect is that the I, once it realizes the absoluteness of its constitution, realizes the stability of its foundation while, on the level of epistemology, the intentionality of its act of self-consciousness seems unstable due to its intentional nature.

In Augustine, however, the difference between *se nosse* and *se cogitare* is not entirely one between non-intentional ontological fact and intentional epistemological access. This is already evident in the terminology '*se nosse*', which is a concept on the level of knowledge. In 10.7, Augustine also holds that when the mind knows itself as it is, the way of thinking of itself coincides with the way it knows itself. Thus, there is an explicit intention to get rid of the difference between *se cogitare* and *se nosse* that is impossible in the Fichtian conceptuality. This intention to get rid of the difference is also evident from the theological context of Augustine's argument. The difference between *se nosse* and *se cogitare* is caused by sin. If there were no sin, there would not be any difference between *se nosse* and *se cogitare*, because the mind would see itself as it is, as under God and as governing the body. This theological context implies that a return to God through salvation is intended to get rid of the distinction once again.

One could make the same point from the perspective of the relationship between Augustine and Plotinus. It seems to me that Fichte is much closer to Plotinus than to Augustine. In Plotinus, the soul realizes – both in the sense of 'becoming aware of' and 'turning into a reality' – its self-identity through its return into the world soul, the Nous. It realizes the identity with itself in something transcendent to itself. The act of self-knowledge is not self-constituting in Plotinus, as Kany rightly notices. In Fichte, this is in fact the same. On the level of intentionality, that is the level of discursive knowledge, self-knowledge is impossible, or at least its certainty cannot be proven. The identity of the self with that which it knows as itself is realized on the level of self-awareness that *precedes* the knowing act of the self because there is no certainty of the identity between the self and the knowledge of it at the level of knowledge. Therefore, the self knows itself at a level that is transcendent to the level of intentional self-knowledge.

As I have noted already, the distinction between the epistemological and the ontological level in Augustine's theory of self-knowledge is much less clear than in Fichte or Plotinus. The similarity between Augustine's theory and those of both philosophers is that the intentional act of self-knowledge (the *se cogitare*-level) already presupposes knowledge of oneself (the *se*

nosse-level). The *se nosse*-level, however, is not, as in Fichte and Plotinus, the ontological identity of the knower and the known in a higher unity, but a kind of epistemic access that Augustine proves is presupposed in the desire to know oneself, namely, an epistemic access to myself that enables me to search for myself. This epistemic access is obscured through sin, not through an ontological gap between the self and its constitution.

Finally, let me say something about the reduplication of the image of God in Brachtendorf's reconstruction of the second half. Brachtendorf's main reason for introducing it is the tension between the dynamic character that the image of God seems to have in Augustine's argument, especially in the 'theological' aspects and the stable character that it has in other passages, especially in the 'philosophical' parts. For example, Augustine explicitly rejects certain suggestions of an image since they are not eternal, but it seems that an image that is so dynamic that it can be lost, will never match the requirement of being dependent on the eternal alone. Thus, in a way, Brachtendorf's reduplication of the image mirrors the tension that is at least felt between the philosophical and the theological strands in the second half of the work. How does the discourse of loss and return that govern the theological strand fare against the indubitable grounds and lines of reasoning which seem to dominate the philosophical strand?

The reduplication, however, although it seems to solve a problem causes another. It is quite evident from Augustine's argument that the moral restoration of the mind is the moral restoration of the original image. The image in its full force, as a result of salvation, is a return to the original situation before the fall. This presupposes one concept of the image of God, rather than two disconnected images. Brachtendorf's construction of two images suggests some sort of neo-Thomist distinction between nature and grace, in which grace is a superaddition to the natural condition of the human mind that remains foreign to the more fundamental human nature. This is certainly not Augustine's view in the second half of *De Trinitate*. The original nature is corrupted and it is precisely this nature that needs to be restored through grace, indeed, through the moral restoration of the mind.

How then should we solve Brachtendorf's problem of a dynamic image on the one hand, and a stable one on the other? In this regard, my key passage is book 14.15, where Augustine says that the image of God does *not* consist in the mere presence of *memoria, intelligentia* and *voluntas*, but rather in the *capability* of loving God above all and one's neighbour as oneself. The *capability* consists in the constitution of the mind as *memoria, intelligentia* and *voluntas* and as a *capability* it is stable and directed towards the eternal. In its realization, however, it is dynamic and subject to loss and regain. I will return to this passage in the next section, in which I will introduce the multilayered argument Augustine develops in the second half of *De Trinitate*.

4.3. A Multilayered Argument

One of the striking things about *De Trinitate* is the difficulty one has in cutting it into parts. Given that the argumentation developed is so complex, most interpreters show a great interest in its division. However, to a considerable extent, cutting this immense complexity into pieces that may be treated individually is a way of demythologizing the secrets of the argument, and the author of this labyrinth does something specifically to preclude this. Although there is a broad consensus concerning a basic division of the work in two parts, even this division takes the form of a transition *within* book 8, and not simply between books 7 and 8.

The transition from the first to the second part does not occur abruptly, and the smoothness with which it occurs is intrinsically related to the overall argument. The overall purpose of *De Trinitate* is to bring us eventually to the true vision of the Trinity, the one true God. 'Vision' then should be read as a reality, as an event, not as a 'correct view of' such a reality. To this purpose, the first seven books tried to ensure that the one we are believing in is the real Trinity, and, thus, they defended the catholic faith against distortions and misunderstandings.

The true understanding of God as Trinity, however, turned out to be extremely fragile, as every understanding of the Trinity stands under the provision of human frailty, our state of sin and uncleanliness. The second half is now intended to move us, rooted in the right understanding of God as we received it from the earlier books, towards the vision of God as God is: the visio *Trinitatis*. As we have seen in the previous chapter, the main hindrance for this *visio* is not so much the ontological difference between the creator and the creature, but rather sin and uncleanliness, which make it impossible for us to see God.

But how to get at this *visio Trinitatis* that makes us eternally happy? That question is in fact the question that Augustine is about to answer in the second half of *De Trinitate*. But the answer is a very complex one, not the least because it is not attempted in a merely theoretical way, explaining what this way might consist of, so that we would have been able to look at it from a distance and to decide whether we like that way or not. The argument that explains how to return is in fact intended to hide the possibility of looking at it from a distance. Neither is the argument intended to teach us the contours of an object so that we can grasp it intellectually. This, as we have seen in previous chapters, is impossible because God cannot be thought as God is. Hence, the argument attempts to put us inside the process of returning to God as God is and to make us follow the logic of our condition in an entirely obvious and unavoidable way. Along that way, Augustine does not pursue just one aim, show us one thing, or make one point, as most books do. He develops many points at once, jumps from the one to the other and weaves them together in a masterful way.

There is a focal point, a centre in the labyrinth so to speak: Christ. Faith in Christ as the only possible way of returning to the *visio Trinitatis* is in fact what Augustine wants to teach us. However, faith in Christ is not presented as something that is to be accepted on authority, or as foreign to and unconnected with our natural condition as creatures. Therefore, part of leading us through the labyrinth is to teach us who we are, how we are related to God, who God is, why we do not know God as we ought, what that leads to, and exactly how that is repaired through faith in Christ. Thus, to teach us faith in Christ, Augustine develops what we would now call an anthropology, both in terms of what we were originally and of what we have become after sin. Part of that anthropology is a psychology, which shows us our original psychological set-up and the consequences of sin for our psychological well-being. But another part of it is what we would now call a fundamental theology, that is, an account of the relationship between our earthly happiness and our relationship with God.

What I would like to propose here is a heuristic tool, a model that we can use during our discussion of the second half in order to keep track of the different layers in the argument. I propose a model consisting of four levels of distinct arguments pursued by Augustine in the second half. At first sight, Augustine seems to be concerned with finding an 'image' of God in human beings, though upon closer inspection this idea of an image turns out to be more complicated than it might seem. Augustine plays with the idea that the concept of a trinity may be better understood through a comparison with the concept of the mind, but, in fact, most of his argument can hardly be understood in terms of this analogy. In the end, when Augustine finally defines the image of God in human beings, he explicitly denies that the image is to be found in some stable 'feature' or structure of the mind as such, apart from the relationship between God and human beings. Instead, the image of God consists in the human beings' *capability* of remembering, knowing and loving God above all:

> This trinity, then, of the mind is not therefore the image of God, because the mind remembers itself, and understands and loves itself; but because it can also remember, understand, and love Him by whom it was made. And in so doing it is made wise itself. But if it does not do so, even when it remembers, understands, and loves itself, then it is foolish. (14.15)

Thus, the image of God is to be thought of as something dynamic that can be put into action, likewise damaged or restored, rather than as a static feature of the ontological structure of the mind. It is static only insofar as it is a capability, which, given that it is the capability, not necessarily the act, and so, as the capability to remember, know and love God above all, it cannot be lost. In drawing on the idea of an image of God in the creaturely world,

Augustine appeals both to a Platonic interest in 'sparks' of higher orders of being in lower forms of being and to the Christian tradition of seeing human beings as created in the image of God. In the second half of *De Trinitate*, Augustine continues to appeal to both of these heritages, trying to convince his pagan or semi-Christian audience of the intellectual credibility of Christianity, while trying to win them over to Christianity.

In order to do so, Augustine develops an argument at several different but strongly interconnected levels, with the most fundamental level being perhaps the anthropological level. At this level, Augustine tries to convince his readership that all human beings have a natural ability to know the true God and the ontological hierarchical place of the mind under God and above everything else in the created order. If the mind respects this order, if it thinks of itself as it ought, it remembers itself as it ought, and it loves itself as it ought. Thus, it is in harmony with God, with others, with the external world, and with itself.

On the second level, Augustine argues that this image of God is damaged through sin, leading to a loss of knowledge of God – although never lost entirely – of the external world, and of itself. This leads him to the idea of a disintegration of the trinity in the mind, resulting in anxiety, hubris, egoism and disharmony. Still, human beings yet have an ineradicable desire for happiness, even though they look for it in the wrong place, finding it in the enjoyment of material things rather than the love of God. They will never lose their capability of remembering, thinking of and loving themselves, however, since this is their nature – Augustine is sometimes a bit ambiguous concerning the question of whether we might lose the knowledge of God after sin.

The remaining trinitarian structure of the mind is the basis for the next step, and in a way, it is the purpose of the argument itself, as the argument is not only intended to show that the structure is there, but is also intended to put the structure into action and restore the original state of the reader's mind by remembering God and returning to the love of God above all as well as of one's neighbour as oneself. For this purpose, Augustine seeks to convince the reader that the original Trinitarian structure is there, that it is to be preferred and in accordance with a human being's true nature, and that their current fallen state is deplorable.

On the basis of this second level, which has been created through a constant moving back and forth between describing a human being's true nature and their present fallen state, the third level is developed. The third level's purpose is to show that faith in Christ the Mediator is the necessary requirement for being able to return to one's original state of happiness. One will not be able to know God truly, and thus truly know oneself and love one's neighbour as one ought, if one does not learn to prefer justice over power and thereby receive the forgiveness of sins, the two main offices of Christ.

Only on a fourth level, I would say, although on the surface at least it might appear to be the first, Augustine attempts to show the intellectual superiority of Christianity over Hellenistic thought, and part of that endeavour is to play with the idea of an image of God in human beings, a sort of 'divine spark' – although Augustine is well enough aware of the limits that Christianity poses on him at this point – in the mind. Rhetorically, however, and this is certainly part of the masterful web of arguments that is woven here, this idea of an image is used as a governing metaphor throughout the whole of the second part of *De Trinitate*, especially books 8–10.

4.4. Book 8: Setting the Scene

The beginning of book 8 looks back at the argument in previous books, but is not merely a summary of the foregoing. The result of the discussion of the Trinity proper in books 5–7 is used to make the starting-point for the discussion to come. The key is the notion of number in God. If in God there is both oneness and threeness, and these are at fundamentally the same level, this is because in God as non-material and non-temporal there is no order of magnitude. This point is made at two levels, or, more precisely phrased, in terms of two transcendentals: truth and goodness. It is remarkable that beauty is absent here,[31] although it plays an implicit role in the discussion of goodness, where Augustine in fact introduces goodness in terms of beauty. The connection between truth and goodness is also remarkable because the analysis of truth is in fact rapidly interrupted by the theme of goodness, which then plays a key role in the rest of book 8, and in fact in the second half of *De Trinitate* as a whole.

Of course mentioning the transcendentals raises the problem of the relationship between Augustine's argument here and the Platonic or more broadly philosophical background. Augustine definitely draws on a number of Platonic themes, such as the idea of God as free of change, time and matter. But even more important are the differences from the Platonic tradition. In the Platonic tradition, the transcendentals are identical. Truth, goodness and beauty are all convertible to being. We will see, however, that this is not the case in Augustine. The participatory structure of reality, along which one can go up from lower levels of being up to higher levels, is broken and as a consequence our participation in creation does not lead us ontologically to a participation in the divine. The move away from participation to a Christian theology of creation, however, is made as smoothly as possible. The language

[31] Contra Matthias Smalbrugge, 'De actuele betekenis van Augustinus' mensbeeld: Schoonheid in plaats van moralisme', in Gerrit Neven and Akke van der Kooi, editors, *Augustinus en Noordmans: Twee denkers in de spanning van moderniteit en postmoderniteit* (Kampen: Kok, 2007), 78–88.

will often be explicitly Platonic, whereas the implications of the Platonic language are pressed to the point of turning into Christianity.

Here is the initial transition between the discussion of oneness and threeness, central to books 5–7, and the idea of an ascent into the divine in books 8–15:

> If we try to think of him as far as he allows and enables us to, we must not think of any special contact or intertwining as it were of three bodies, any fusion of joints in the manner in which the fables picture the three-bodied Geryon. Any such thing that occurs to the mind so as to make the three bigger than any one of them, or one less than two, must be rejected without hesitation. Indeed any and every bodily conception is to be so rejected. As for spiritual conceptions, anything that is changeable about them must not be thought to be God. (8.3)

As such, this sounds perfectly Platonic: an ascent from multiplicity to perfect unity. This unity is then in fact pressed so strongly that it is no longer a unity over against multiplicity. It is a lack of number altogether. It is certainly a play with Platonic themes, as we find it elsewhere in Augustine and in *De Trinitate*. However, the subtleties are in the details. If one looks more closely at the way in which Platonic themes occur here, one encounters a number of differences that will turn out to characterize the background of the second half of *De Trinitate* and as such, the way in which the return to the divine is construed in Augustine's theology.

It may help to look at them in terms of the concepts of ontology and epistemology. At the ontological level, it seems that Augustine's statements correspond perfectly to the Platonic teaching: there is no change in God, no number. Implicitly, however, Augustine modifies the ontological structure underlying the difference between God and the world. Therefore, the route of epistemic access to God or the One, that is available in Platonism, is no longer available in Augustine. We see this in a quote that immediately follows on the previous one:

> For it is no small part of knowledge, when we emerge from these depths to breathe in that sublime atmosphere, if before we can know what God is, we are at least able to know what he is not. He is certainly not the earth, nor the heavens, nor like earth and heavens, nor any such thing as we see in the heavens, nor any such thing as we do not see in the heavens and yet may perhaps be there all the same. Nor if you increase the light of the sun in your imagination as much as you can, whether to make it greater or brighter a thousand times even or to infinity, not even that is God. Nor is he as you may think of angels, pure spirits 'inspiriting' the heavenly bodies and changing and turning them as they judge best in their service of God; not even if all *thousand times a thousand* (Dn 7:10; Rv 5:11) of them were lumped together to

> make one, is God anything like that; not even if you think of these same spirits as being without bodies, which is extremely difficult for flesh-bound thoughts to conceive of. (8.3)

Prima facie, the move that Augustine makes here is the one that he rejected in Plotinus at the beginning of *De Trinitate*, as I have argued in Chapter 1, namely, the introduction of a fully negative concept of God. However, in fact, the gap between God and the world is made even more severe than it is in Platonism. Augustine stresses the distance between God and us, and it turns out that there is hardly a mediation that helps us to bridge it. For the Platonists, this bridge was obvious. However far away the One might be, and however ontologically different it may be from our condition, there is a way towards it readily available for us to use: the soul. Because everything that is receives its existence from the One, there is in everything something that points back to the stage of being immediately above it. Thus, if the human being turns inwards and begins to contemplate her own existence through the use of reason, the soul will return to a higher stage of unity, the world soul. This world soul, which is the world's consciousness of its inner unity in the Platonic ideas, returns then to its ultimate ground, the One, which is unity beyond thought and consciousness.

Augustine appropriates from Platonism the stress on the ontological difference between God and the world, but he in fact drops the participatory structure between them, so that the epistemological way back, which in Platonism is always there at everyone's disposal, becomes problematic. This is in a nutshell the very ground of existence of the second half of *De Trinitate*. Even if the second half is in some sense an ascent, or better yet a return to the vision of God, this return is fundamentally different and, more importantly, much more complex than the ascent in a Neoplatonic system.

In the last part of this subsection 8.3, we see what the consequences are of this denial of the participatory structure between God and the world:

> Come, see if you can, O *soul weighed down with the body that decays* (Wis 9:15) and burdened with many and variable earthy thoughts, come see it if you can – God is truth. For it is written *that God is light* (1 Jn 1:5) not such as these eyes see, but such as the mind sees when it hears 'He is truth.' Do not ask what truth is; immediately a fog of bodily images and a cloud of fancies will get in your way and disturb the bright fair weather that burst on you the first instant when I said 'truth.' Come, hold it in that first moment in which so to speak you caught a flash from the corner of your eye when the word 'truth' was spoken, stay there if you can. But you cannot; you slide back into these familiar and earthy things. And what weight is it, I ask, that drags you back but the birdlime of greed for the dirty junk you have picked up on your wayward wanderings? (8.3)

Again there is the play with the Platonic themes, but the concept of truth is here construed in a different way than in Platonism, causing the break between truth and goodness that motivates the transition to the discussion of goodness in 8.4. Due to the denial of the epistemological access to God through the knowledge of the world, Augustine stimulates the reader to 'jump' into the divine immediately, stressing that this leap will fail. God is a light that cannot be seen with the eye – Platonists would wholeheartedly agree – but God as the impermeable light is seen with the heart when it is heard that God is truth – Scripture enters the scene; Platonists do not know this.

The truth, therefore, is not something you find inwards. God is the truth and you, as it were, touch God when you hear the word spoken to you, but one is not in a position to hold on to it. This means that for Augustine, the truth – the old English translation remarkably adds '[reality]' – is not in the world, but beyond it. God is not mediated ontologically in the world, and we cannot touch God because of our sins. This breaks the possibility of finding God along the way of truth, and motivates the switch to the notion of goodness.

We are now really on the move towards the various threads that, woven together, make up the material for Augustine's argument in the second half of *De Trinitate*. Especially in this half, we will encounter a typical style of writing, or more specifically, a certain rhetoric. One might name it a rhetoric of suspense. Book 8 from 8.4 onwards is already a very good example of this rhetorical technique. In a way, all the themes that make up the second half are introduced in book 8, but the reader will initially not notice many of them. They are mentioned in passing, often not even as specific topics or subjects that Augustine draws special attention to, but they are then taken up later on and brought to full force. The style of writing is very exploratory, the tone very modest, as if the author himself does not know how to proceed. The argument can be very confusing, seemingly leaping from one topic to another without a clear connection between the different parts of the argument.

In the quote just given, we see an example of this in Augustine's remarks about the fog of images and the cloud of bodily desires foreshadowing his psychology of sin, more elaborately discussed in book 10. After all, Augustine was a first-class rhetor, and upon closer inspection it turns out that almost no element, including those that seem simply dropped in, remains unused. Arguments that seemed harmless and without significance at first sight turn out to contain a full force in defence of Christianity. Let us try to follow the sometimes confusing line of argument in book 8 and attempt to identify the major building blocks for the subsequent argument, and see how they are woven together here.

At the beginning of 8.4, Augustine seems to continue with the theme of an attempt at the direct vision of God:

> Once more come, see if you can. You certainly only love what is good, and the earth is good with its lofty mountains and its folded hills and its level plains. (8.4)

Although it seems the argument goes on, a sudden leap is made from truth as a transcendental, to goodness. In addition, we see two major building blocks of the argument that will follow: goodness and love, although at first sight, the concept of love remains rather insignificant and perhaps even unnoticed.

Along with goodness and love comes almost the whole of creation. Where creation offered little or nothing from the perspective of truth, it offers everything from the perspective of goodness. Everything seems useful in our search for God because in everything, there is something good. But then again, the leap is made from good things to the good in itself:

> This is good and that is good. Take away this and that and see good itself if you can. In this way you will see God, not good with some other good, but the good of every good. For surely among all these good things I have listed and whatever others can be observed or thought of, we would not say that one is better than another when we make a true judgment unless we had impressed on us some notion of good itself by which we both approve of a thing, and also prefer one thing to another. That is how we should love God, not this or that good but good itself, and we should seek the good of the soul, not the good it can hover over in judgment but the good it can cleave to in love, and what is this but God? Not good mind or good angel or good heavens, but good good. (8.4)

In this quotation, we encounter once again several crucial building blocks for subsequent argumentation. First, God as the good good, not good by something other than itself. This reminds us of the discussion of the simplicity of God in books 5–7. In a way, this is the principle controlling the whole argument. Because God is good, every human judgement concerning the goodness of something depends on it. If one 'has' it, one will see the world properly. If one loses sight of it, one's perception of the world will become corrupt. As the good itself, God is also necessarily to be loved, and to be loved above all else. Everything else is to be loved in Him. And true love as such can only be love of the good, Godself as the good itself, but also the good that we find in others and ourselves as the true nature of things created good by God. These themes are almost all already implied here, although they appear only in passing, but they make up the core decisions that govern the argument in the rest of the book, and even much of the rest of the work.

Augustine takes all sorts of secondary routes, however. Here we see it in one of his famous attempts to make something clearer by putting it differently –

which often turns out to be rather confusing because Augustine uses it as an opportunity to introduce new problems or new themes:

> Perhaps it will be easier to perceive what I want to say if we put it like this. When I hear it said, for example, 'a good mind,' just as there are two words used, so do I understand two things from these words, one by which it is a mind, another by which it is good. And of course in order to be a mind it did not do anything itself; it was not already there to do anything in order to be. But in order to be a good mind I see that it must deliberately choose to do something. Not of course that simply being a mind is not something good – how else could it be said, and very truly said, to be better than the body? But the reason it is not yet called a good mind is that it still remains for it to act by deliberate choice in order to acquire excellence. If it neglects to do this it is justly blamed and rightly said to be not a good mind; for it diverges from one that does so act, and as this one is praiseworthy, so it follows that the one who does not act is blameworthy. But when it does act with this intention and become a good mind, it cannot in fact achieve this unless it turns to something which it is not itself. And where is it to turn to in order to become a good mind but to the good, when this is what it loves and reaches for and obtains? And if again it turns away from it and becomes not good by the very fact of turning from the good, it will have nowhere to turn to again if it wishes to reform, unless that good which it has turned away from remains in itself. (8.4)

Notice how Augustine announced this quote as a way to make things clearer by putting them differently. What he *does*, however, is that he introduces several new themes that he needs for his argument, but which are not necessarily pleasing to his semi-pagan readership. The most important concept introduced is that of the will and along with it, but very implicitly, the concept of sin and even more implicitly, the necessity of grace.

In order to see the force of these concepts and their far reaching implications for the semi-pagan readership, we need to return for a while to the Platonic frame of reference. In Platonism, the soul is actually divine, and the goodness of the soul and the nature of the will in turning the soul back to its perfect state is formulated in terms of its relationship to the body. Therefore, a Platonic soul is divine, and it is better insofar as it is untouched by its connection with matter, as matter is a lack of goodness. The will plays a role in the goodness of the soul insofar as it may – in a reading of Platonism that presupposes a maximum power of the will – return the soul out of its connection to matter and let it return to the One.

The Platonic construction of the will has rather drastic consequences for evil and human responsibility. Plotinus is quite frank about this. If we do evil, this is due to the bounds of the soul to matter. Evil deeds are not as such

acts of the soul. The soul itself, insofar as it is not connected to matter, does not act at all, and insofar as it acts and does evil, this is due to the bounds to matter. It is not caused by the soul itself.[32]

In Augustine, the picture is rather different. In Augustine, matter is no longer equal to a lack of goodness and as such, evil. Moreover, Augustine introduces a will in the soul. The soul is not simply good by being divine and, as such, rooted in the world soul. The soul or, as Augustine will call it mostly, the mind, has in itself, while being a created good as such, the possibility of turning to or turning away from the good good that is God. Once more, as one sees at the end of the quotation, turning away from the good good leads to a dangerous loss that possibly cannot be repaired at will, because something you lose, you cannot simply find by turning back towards it, unless you retained it in some way. Augustine plays with the possibility of losing track of God entirely, without saying that this happens in the case of sin. At the end of 8.5, we will even see that he explicitly affirms that God remains in the soul as a guarantee for return. This does not mean a contradiction to his anti-Pelagian works, because *knowing* the good to some extent, which remains after sin, does not mean *willing* it.

Most of the building blocks for Augustine's theology of the second half of *De Trinitate* have been introduced now. The reader has been firmly recommended to cleave to God as the highest good that is God, love God above all. Non-Christian readers will only to a limited extent have noticed something in the argument so far that is specifically Christian. Although initially challenged by the gap between God and the world along the lines of truth, the impression of a natural access to the good sounded familiar and eased the Platonic minds. I think this is intentional. As we have argued in Chapter 1, Augustine is moving back and forth between making the connection with a semi-pagan readership and moving them towards Christianity, showing that Christianity provides the necessary answer to a problem unsolved in Platonism. That the Platonism in which this problem is unsolved has already been Christianized on the way, Augustine does not tell his readers.

At the beginning of 8.6, we see a sudden switch to Christianity:

> But we also have to stand by and cling to this good in love, in order to enjoy the presence of him from whom we are, whose absence would mean that we could not even be. For since *we are still walking by faith and not by sight* (2 Cor 5:7) we do not yet see God, as the same apostle says, *face to face* (1 Cor 13:12). Yet unless we love him even now, we shall never see him. (8.6)

As we have seen, Augustine had already built in a possibility of turning away from God that was more radical than the one present in Platonism. In his

[32] See, for example, Plotinus, *Enneads* 1.2.6, 1.8.4, 1.8.14.

attempt to ascend to God as truth, at the beginning of book 8, he had also radicalized the gap between God and the world, but this was entirely clothed in Platonic language, so his semi-pagan readership might hardly have noticed it. Now, however, it is exploited to its full force: we do not yet see God and only the vision of God will be our true happiness. All of a sudden, the various mediations of God through the good seem to have faded away and the reader is confronted with a big problem: where is God to be found? Thus, the direct vision of God, the moment of truth in Augustine, because only God is truth, requires the perfect love of God, which means the perfect goodness of the creature.

The leap is intentional, as I have suggested above. Augustine confuses his readers by reshuffling the material, approaching it from another angle, persuading his readers of necessary steps to be taken in order to reach a goal that they have been brought to appreciate. The readers wanted God, the good, and love it with a firm mind. They saw the chance of loosing it and, now, they will be convinced that they need Christianity to regain it.

The clash between the requirement of moral perfection along with the vision of God as the truth leads to a problem that will run through books 8–10, a chicken-or-egg problem:

> But who can love what he does not know? Something can be known and not loved; what I am asking is whether something can be loved which is unknown, because if it cannot then no one loves God before he knows him. And what does knowing God mean but beholding him and firmly grasping him with the mind? For he is not a body to be examined with the eyes in your head. But then to behold and grasp God as he can be beheld and grasped is only permitted to the pure in heart – *blessed are the pure in heart, because they shall see God* (Mt 5:8); so before we are capable of doing this we must first love by faith, or it will be impossible for our hearts to be purified and become fit and worthy to see him. (8.6)

This is the chicken-or-egg problem: to be able to love God, we need to know God, but before we can know/see God, we need to love God, as no one is pure of heart unless he loves God from a pure heart.

Faith has been introduced to solve the chicken-or-egg problem. This role of faith is also a thread running through the second part of *De Trinitate*, but more in books 11 to 14 than in 9 to 10. Faith, namely, has everything to do with external things. Faith is ultimately intended to bring one to invisible things, the direct vision of God, but always through visible things, because the direct vision is unavailable. In books 12–14, we will see that the distinction between *scientia* and *sapientia* dominates the discussion. The crux to the function of *scientia* in bringing us back to our original *sapientia* is already introduced here, and its function is construed consistently. Faith in

visible things, Christ, which is our *scientia*, restores our purity of heart, so that our original ability to see God directly, *sapientia*, is repaired.

But how is faith going to repair our original righteousness? What role do external creaturely things play in it? The basics of an answer to this question are given in book 8, although not much more than that. A key role in how faith in external things helps us to purify us is played by yet another concept that we will encounter later on, especially book 11 discussed in the next chapter, that is, the concept of memory. Along with it goes fantasy, or more precisely phrased, imagination. It turns out that in our approach to external things, there is always something outside, a story, a thing, that resounds with something inside, a memory, and the creative combination of these by the intellect leads to belief (strictly speaking, Augustine reserves knowledge for direct access to what is known). Through our human creativity, we are able to combine elements from different memories to imagine something we hear about, but have never seen. These concepts are introduced by Augustine like this:

> But now, when we believe some material or physical facts we read or hear about but have not seen, we cannot help our imaginations fabricating something with the shape and outline of bodies as it may occur to our thoughts, and this will either not be true, or if it is true, which can only happen extremely rarely, this is not what it profits us to hold on faith. (8.7)

The purpose of this is that the faithful use of Scripture awakens in us a love for the justice and humility of the persons described in Scripture through which our minds are purified and restored on the way towards the vision of God. This then, finally, puts Christ at the centre because it is precisely faith in Christ that purifies us:

> Nor is our faith bothered with what physical features those men had, but only with the fact that they lived like that by the grace of God and did the things which those scriptures bear witness to. This is what it is useful and desirable to believe and there is no need to despair of its possibility. . . . It is in terms of this sort of notion that our thoughts are framed when we believe that God became a human being for us as an example of humility and to demonstrate God's love for us. This indeed it is useful for us to believe and to hold firm and unshaken in our hearts, that the humility thanks to which God was born of a woman, and led through such abuse at the hands of mortal men to his death, is a medicine to heal the tumor of our pride and a high sacrament to break the chains of sin. (8.7)

We begin now to see something of the solution to the problem of the chicken-or-egg problem, of how we can return to the vision of God. The basis is God

as the supreme good, who is only to be seen by those who are pure of heart. Along with it goes the idea of what one may call a 'sixth sense' for God, so that we somehow know what the good is, although we cannot operationalize this knowledge due to our sin. The solution is complex and multilayered. Through the contemplation of fellow human beings who embody for us the ideal of holiness, of the just man, our love for justice is stimulated as it were so that we want to live as they lived. One cannot overlook here the parallel with book 8 of the *Confessiones*. There we see the lives of Anthony and Marius Victorinus putting into action what is described here in a theoretical and seemingly speculative way. Their holiness convinced Augustine of the truth and goodness of their way of living and provided the basis for his definitive conversion to Christianity.

Of course, as we have seen in the previous chapter, the awakening of our desire for justice and God through our encounters with holy human beings does not suffice to heal our souls from sin and anxiety. Our anxiety can only be healed through the incarnation of the Son of God, who suffers for our sin, showing us God's love for sinners and God's preference of justice over power.

The 'solution' to the question of how to love and know God after the fall, however, leaves two problems unsolved. First of all, there is a risk implied in using the imagination as a way towards the knowledge of God because the construction of an 'image' of God on the basis of a creative reuse of memory might easily lead to the construction of a God who does not exist. I have already quoted the introduction of the theme of memory and imagination, where Augustine suggests that we fabricate for ourselves things that can never or only rarely exist. As such, this is not a problem and even a gift to humanity, but it is dangerous when it comes to the knowledge of God who is Trinity:

> So then, since we desire to understand as far as it is given us the eternity and equality and unity of the Trinity, and since we must believe before we can understand, we must take care our faith is not fabricated. This is the Trinity we are to enjoy in order to live in bliss; but if we have false beliefs about it our hope is vain and our charity is not chaste. (8.8)

There is a second problem, however, that makes the use of the imagination in the case of God even more problematic: the uniqueness of God as Trinity:

> In the same way perhaps, when we say and believe that there is a Trinity, we know what a trinity is because we know what three are. But then this is not what we love. We can always have that when we want, simply by flashing three fingers, to say nothing else. Perhaps then what we love is not what any trinity is but the Trinity that God is. So what we love in the Trinity is what God is. But we have never seen or known another God, because God is one, he alone is God whom we love by believing,

> even though we have not yet seen him. What we are asking, though, is from what likeness or comparison of things known to us we are able to believe, so that we may love the as yet unknown God. (8.8)

With this search for an analogy between God as Trinity and trinities in the created order, Augustine returns to a layer in his argument that has been left untouched for some time, namely, the layer in which a search for 'images' of the Trinity in the created order dominates the discourse. As I have argued above, this layer runs through the second half, but much of the argument seems to escape this layer. This is because the answer to the question of an image will turn out to be quite different from what we would expect it to be, and this is probably also true for Augustine's first readers. Through touching this layer, Augustine takes them up at a familiar place, namely, that of intellectual curiosity into the nature of the spiritual realm, but rhetorically moving them to another: the Christian vision of God from a purified mind.

To our surprise, Augustine now returns to the topic of the righteous human being.[33] This seems a leap into a different subject, but in fact it is not. The returning analysis of the just human being plays the role of a *praeparatio evangelica* for the 'image' of the Trinity in love that Augustine is going to present after this lengthy discussion of the just human being. Meanwhile, in this discussion, Augustine 'drops' another topic that will play a major role in the next two books: self-knowledge. How is it that I know that I am? Is this through seeing the souls of others? Of course not, because they are of a spiritual nature. The theme is touched on just in passing, to be taken up at length in book 10:

> Not implausibly we say that we know what mind is for the simple reason that we ourselves also have a mind. At least we have never seen one with our eyes, or gathered a generic or specific notion of what it is from the likeness of several we have seen. But it is rather, as I said, that we have one ourselves. What after all is so intimately known and so aware of its own existence as that by which things enter into our awareness, namely the mind? (8.9)

An excursion into the topic of book 10, as it occurs here, and similar complicating arguments, turn in 8.9 into a very lengthy and complicated section. Still, Augustine in fact wants to argue for only one thing:

> So then a human being who is believed to be just is loved and appreciated according to that form and truth which the one who is loving perceives and understands in himself; but this form and truth cannot be loved and appreciated according to the standard of anything else.

[33] In passing, he gives away an important argument against the accusation of body and soul dualism when he says that Paul is no longer a man because his soul and body have been separated. Cf. also 9.2, where Augustine deals with this problem more extensively.

> We simply cannot find anything else besides this, which is such that from this something else that we know we can love by believing this form and truth, while it is still unknown to us. (8.9)

Augustine is confusing his readers here. He even seems to be of two minds with regard to the question of whether human access to God has been lost after the fall or not. As we will see, at the end of book 8, he explicitly affirms that after the fall God is neither totally unknown nor unloved, but here he seems to suggest that we need faith to know and love the form and truth on the basis of which we love just human beings. In books 12 and 13, we will encounter a similar and more severe account of the loss of access to God as we find here. It seems that Augustine needs a balance here that keeps him away from two extremes because these extremes hurt his intention to lead his readers to Christ: one extreme is that access to God is totally lost. This extreme makes Augustine's attempt to convince his readers of their original happiness and make them long for regaining it, superfluous. The other extreme is that his readers still have natural access to God, and then without any damage. This extreme is perhaps even more dangerous because it makes faith in Christ superfluous.

An interesting question would be whether the balance that Augustine presents is consistent. One thing is clear, and that is that in the history of Christianity after him the balance has often turned to one of both extremes. The Reformation has largely tended towards the first extreme, whereas the Roman Catholic tradition has sometimes tended towards the second. This is not the place to argue extensively for the consistency of Augustine's balance. At the end of this chapter, I will try to show that an anthropology that combines both an original state of perfection and a severe but still not destructive damage to that original state through a fall offers theologians interesting and important options, even today.

The line of reasoning in 8.9 is a *praeparatio evangelica* because Augustine construes a trinity here, although he does not name it as such. The love of the just human being is described as a love for the other on the basis of a unique form and truth (*forma et ueritate*) that those who love and believe the other to be just, discern and understand within themselves. This is in fact the trinity of love that is introduced at the beginning of the next section: a trinity between the lover, the beloved and love itself:

> Thus it is that in this question we are occupied with about the Trinity and about knowing God, the only thing we really have to see is what true love is; well in fact, simply what love is. Only if it is true love does it deserve to be called love, otherwise it is covetousness; and thus covetous people are said improperly to love, and those who love are said improperly to covet. True love then is that we should live justly by cleaving to the truth, and so for the love of men by which we wish them to live justly we should despise all mortal things. In this way we

> will be ready and able even to die for the good of our brethren, as the Lord Jesus Christ taught us by his example. (8.10)

The different layers begin to converge now. The knowledge of God as the good good, the principle on the basis of which we judge about the goodness of things, human beings and ourselves, is mirrored in true love, which is also directed at God as the highest, and our neighbours as ourselves. The exercise of this love through faith, which is from hearing the stories about the saints and especially the life of Christ, restores our original salvation, thus making us fitting for the direct vision of God in the eschaton.

Along with this goes the layer of the image, although the idea of an image has been transformed along the way: our love of the just human being is rooted in a love for love, and this love makes up a Trinity: '. . . But when I see it, I don't see any trinity in it. Oh but you do see a trinity if you see charity' (8.12) and in summary at the end: 'Now love means someone loving and something loved with love. There you are with three, the lover, what is being loved, and love' (8.14).

How apologetic the intention of the whole argument has been, becomes clear after the introduction of the concept of love as the key to knowing God as Trinity, when in 8.11, Augustine issues a sharp criticism against the way of trying to see God in pagan circles:

> Therefore those who seek God through these powers which rule the world or parts of the world are in fact being swept away from him and cast up a long way off, not in terms of distance but of divergence of values; they are trying to go by an outer route and forsaking their own inwardness, where God is present more inwardly still. So even supposing they could hear or in any manner raise their thoughts to some holy power of heaven, it would be rather his mighty deeds they would be after, which amaze human weakness; they would not think of imitating his piety, by which the divine rest is attained. They would rather proudly be able to do what an angel can than devotedly be what an angel is. For no really holy being takes pleasure in his own power, but rather in the power of him from whom he receives the power to do whatever he appropriately can do; and he knows it is far more effective to be bound to the almighty by a devout and dutiful will than by his own will to be able to do things that overawe those who cannot do them. (8.11)

Here we see a glimpse of the discussion of the order of justice and power, as we have seen in the previous chapter when we discussed book 13. And indeed, here too, the Christian message follows immediately:

> And so though the Lord Jesus Christ himself did such things, he wished to open the eyes of men who were amazed and spellbound by such

> unusual temporal deeds to larger perspectives, and convert them to eternal and more inward realities; so he said, *Come to me, you who toil and are heavy burdened, and I will refresh you; take my yoke upon you* – and he did not add 'Learn of me, because I raise those who have been four days dead,' but he said *Learn of me because I am meek and lowly of heart* (Mt 11:28). A down-to-earth lowliness is stronger and safer than a wind-swept *hauteur*. (8.11)

Notice how Augustine, although speaking here in a very explicitly Christian way, still keeps an eye on his non-Christian readers by putting Christ's work in terms of turning us away from temporal deeds towards eternal and more inward things.

In 8.13, the just man re-enters the scene for the last time, and this provides us with a clue to the solution of the problem of circularity. The section begins with an extended quote from Paul's Second Letter to Corinthians 6.2–10. I give the full quotation here because it is an integral part of the rhetorics of the argument:

> After all, why is it, I would like to know, that we catch fire when we hear and read: *Behold now is the acceptable time, behold now is the day of salvation. Giving no offense in anything that our ministry may not be criticized, but in all things commending ourselves as the ministers of God, in much patience, in troubles, in need, in difficulties, in blows, in prisons, in riots, in labors; in vigils, in fasts, in chastity, in knowledge, in long-suffering, in goodness, in the Holy Spirit, in charity unfeigned, in the word of truth, in the power of God; with the weapons of justice in the right hand and the left, with glory and obscurity, with ill repute and good repute, as seducers and yet truthful, as ones who are ignorant and yet known, as dying and behold we are alive, as coerced and not done to death, as sad but always rejoicing, as poor but enriching many, as having nothing and possessing all things* (2 Cor 6:2–10)?

After the quotations, Augustine immediately proceeds:

> What is it that fires us with love for the apostle Paul when we read this, if not that we believe he himself lived like that? But that God's ministers should live like that we do not believe on hearing it from someone else, we observe it within ourselves, or rather above ourselves in truth itself. (8.13)

We have a number of things here. First, the quote from Scripture. The quotation is not a mere illustration of the words of Paul. It is part of the very argument. Through the reading of Scripture our heart is stirred. Augustine does not just want to mention this as something that happens, but, rhetorically, he

aims at making it happen to the reader. The stories about the saints are presented as healing words that bring the presence of God near to us. Thus, brotherly love stimulates the love of God because in loving our brothers and sisters we also love love, which is God. Second, this healing effect of our breathing in the Spirit of God within the community of faith presupposes that we never lost access to the eternal form altogether. Therefore, our natural ability to 'see' the highest good continues to control the strategy for return, even though the grace of God in the community of faith is necessary to heal it. Third, I would like to draw attention to the subtle modification of the 'interior master' into 'or rather above ourselves, in the truth itself' (8.13). Here we see the break with the Platonic tradition insofar as the Truth is no longer something that we can find in our own mind in the way in which Platonism construed it. The vision of God is really a vision.

At the end of book 8, Augustine confirms the conviction that the solution to the chicken-or-egg problem is not the gift of something entirely new, as if grace recreates a new human being that was not there before. Our love of just human beings links up with our natural access to God that has been retained even after the fall:

> Thus on the one hand love of that form we believe they lived up to makes us love their life, and on the other belief in their life stirs us to a more blazing charity toward that form; with the result that the more brightly burns our love for God, the more surely and serenely we see him, because it is in God that we observe that unchanging form of justice which we judge that a man should live up to. Faith therefore is a great help for knowing and loving God, not as though he were altogether unknown or altogether not loved without it, but for knowing him all the more clearly and loving him all the more firmly. (8.13)

Through the connection between love and justice, introduced as early as 8.4, Augustine manages to weave together all the layers of his argument: our original happiness in love of God above all, as the good good, our fall in turning away from it, the possibility of returning through faith in Christ, and the question of where to find an image of the Trinity in the created order.

This quotation raises questions concerning the doctrine of grace, especially so since *De Trinitate* is written during the time of the Pelagian controversy. It is remarkable that Augustine does not explicitly mention it at all in the work as a whole. Still, as far as I can see, his theology in *De Trinitate* is broadly consistent with his views in the anti-Pelagian works. This, it seems to me, is also the case with the claim quoted. God is known to some extent, even after sin, and God is even loved to some extent, because longed for. This does not mean, however, that human beings on their own would be able to return to God and love God as they ought. This should

suffice for now. We will follow Augustine's lead and leave the doctrine of grace to be dealt with elsewhere.

4.5. Book 9: The Trinity in Self-Love

The beginning of book 9 is rather strange. Having found the Trinity in love, the lover and the beloved at the end of book 8, Augustine opens the new book with an emphatic return to the theme of the search:

> A trinity is certainly what we are looking for, and not any kind of trinity either but the one that God is, the true and supreme and only God. Wait for it then, whoever you are that are listening to this; we are still looking, and no one can fairly find fault with someone who is looking for such things as this, provided that in looking for something so difficult either to know or to express, he remains absolutely firm in faith. (9.1)

In the rest of this introductory section, Augustine warns extensively against the idea of already having found that for which one is searching. Once more, he repeats the findings of books 5–7 in terms of a concise definition of the Trinity, the 'mantra', as I called it in Chapter 2:

> As far then as this question of ours is concerned, let us believe that Father and Son and Holy Spirit are one God, maker and ruler of all creation; and that the Father is not the Son, and the Holy Spirit is neither the Father nor the Son, but that they are a trinity of persons related to each other, and a unity of equal being. (9.1)

This opening is all the more surprising given the content of book 9. Both this book and the next are full of highly technical ways of reasoning concerning the creature. Perhaps Augustine fears that the reader might easily forget about the fact that the thing which we are seeking is not some sort of concept but the living God, the Trinity. At the beginning of this book, Augustine warns his readers not to think that they have already found God, God who can only be seen face to face after this life. Faith as based on the authority of Scripture and the Church is necessary to come to understanding. Therefore, the orthodox version of the doctrine of the Trinity is repeated. The transition to the rest of the book is then made in the following way:

> For instance, we are now eager to see whether this transcendent charity is peculiarly the Holy Spirit. If it is not, then at least either the Father is charity, or the Son or the Trinity itself is, since we cannot withstand the certitude of faith and the great weight of scriptural authority which says *God is charity* (1 Jn 4:8.16). What we have to avoid is the sacrilegious

> mistake of saying anything about the Trinity which does not belong to the creator but rather to the creature, or which is fabricated by vain imaginings. (9.1)

What follows – together with book 10 – is one of the most technical books of *De Trinitate*. We should not lose track, however, of the fact that the argument developed in it has basically already been presented in book 8. It is now developed again with particular attention to the idea of an image of the Trinity in human beings, but as tempting as the idea of an image of God in human beings is, we should not take the argument out of its theological context, a context that was already fleshed out in book 8. God is the good good, goodness itself. There is an imprint of that goodness in us, but it has been damaged through sin, so that we hold things for the good good that are not. Through love, that is our act of will through which we are drawn towards that which is good, we follow that which we hold to be good. If we love God on the basis of a proper knowledge of God, and thus love God as God is, the good good, the one to be loved in and of Godself, we will love love, and thus love also our neighbour as ourselves, which leads to a trinity becoming visible between the lover, the beloved and love itself.

This is basically the image, but it is not yet the image that Augustine is searching for, because the love between persons is not what theologically *and* philosophically could count as an *imago Dei*. Once more, Augustine really attempts to play various and differing games at the same time; he argues on different layers, as I have suggested in section 4.3. In book 9, he pushes his argument towards the 'image'-game, the last layer in my taxonomy. By strongly suggesting that there is indeed some sort of 'image' as a kind of offprint of the Trinity in human beings, he makes a strong appeal to his semi-pagan readers, who have been prepared to look for some shadow of eternal things in the worldly order. Augustine fulfils the expectation of an image, but in a way different from what his readers may expect.

In some respects, his ways of dealing with the notions of substance and relation in book 9 come very close to an attempt to prove that the conceptual structure – of *mens, notitia, amor*, the mind, the knowledge and love of it – is of the same metaphysical kind as the relationship between Father, Son and Spirit. The extensive analysis of the relationship and the nature of the three in *mens* strongly suggests an interest in this. However, this would violate the beginning of book 9 and book 8.8, where Augustine explicitly stresses the fact that God is one of a kind. In addition, as we will see, the image-layer alone cannot provide a complete explanation for all of the aspects of the argument. It needs to the combined with the first and the second layer, the anthropological and 'sin'-layer.

The 'sin'-layer and, thus, the possible damage done to the original condition of human beings is introduced in terms of dynamicizing the image of God in human beings. The semi-pagan readers are subtly prepared for Christianity in

that the image that is seemingly discovered is dynamicized. In the Trinitarian 'image' that appears as *mens, notitia, amor*, the idea of 'perfection' plays an important role. This means that the image is not simply there, although, yes, in a sense, it is. As we have seen in the previous section, some image – that is, some love of oneself – and some knowledge of oneself remain after sin, but there will only be a real unity between the members of the 'trinity' if the image comes to perfection. We will see in the discussion of book 10 that this plays a crucial role in preparing the readers for Christianity because it is only through faith in Christ that the image can be restored to perfection again.

Still, this is not everything that happens in book 9. The final game that Augustine plays here is much less rhetorical: thinking through the love of a single person for oneself, this book can be read as a reflection on the conditions of possibility of book 8. If the purpose of human beings is fulfilled in their love of God and the love of one's neighbour as oneself, what sort of anthropological structure does this presuppose in the individual's love of oneself? This is one of the questions that Augustine pursues in book 9.

In spite of construing book 9 as a reflection on the condition of possibility of the argument in book 8, the analysis of the love of oneself as an individual is not more fundamental or more properly Trinitarian than the analysis of love between persons. The love of oneself is both a part and a requirement for the love of one's neighbour, as Scripture says, and Augustine tries to make sense of this at a fundamental anthropological level. Book 10 will elaborate on this by asking what the triad of *mens, notitia, amor* presupposes about the relationship between *mens* and *notitia*, which leads to a new triad *memoria, intelligentia, voluntas*.

Now that we have an overview of the different layers of the argument developed by Augustine in this book, let us take a closer look at the most important steps taken to reach these diverse goals. Before we go on, it is good to stress that the analysis which is offered here is still one about love, not about the mind as such. The unity between the three distinct phenomena is the unity of the loving person, not the unity of the mind as such. Anyone who reads this book 9 as a philosophy of mind misses this point.

The first step in book 9, after the rehearsal of the doctrine of the Trinity has been completed, is the shift from the love between two persons to the love of oneself, as the initial problem is that the love of oneself is not a trinity, so that love itself would not be truly trinitarian. The solution to this problem, which is introduced in 9.2, is given at the beginning of 9.3, where Augustine offers the knowledge of oneself as the third required for the love of oneself: 'Now the mind cannot love itself unless it also knows itself. How can it love what it does not know?' Then, there are three, the lover, which is the mind loving itself, love, and the knowledge of oneself, required to be able to love oneself. With this addition of the concept of knowledge, of course, the problem that bothered Augustine so much in book 8, how to love someone that one does not know, has potentially entered the scene,

and we will see that indeed, in book 10, self-knowledge as the intentional act of knowing oneself is not a given, but a sign of the perfection and good order of the self.

In the meantime, however, two other problems have already been introduced. The first is the problem of the image of God in the *prima facie* sense, the idea of a conceptual or even an ontological similarity between the way God is and creaturely things are. The second is the soteriological purpose of the analysis. The development of an idea of an image of God is intended to suggest a conceptual similarity, but is also intended to make the reader aware of the dynamic character of the image, which means that the image might become damaged, impaired, or be in a perfect condition. The image is not just there, it needs to be perfected, repaired or kept intact.

The first problem becomes visible even before the problem of a trinity in the case of self-love has been solved, which happens in 9.3 with the addition of self-knowledge to mind and love. Already in 9.2, we find an argument for the unity and mutual interdependence of mind and love, and yet their independence when taken on their own:

> Love and mind, however, are not two spirits but one spirit, not two beings but one being; and yet they are two somethings, lover and love, or if you like beloved and loved. And these are called two things relatively to one another. . . . So then, insofar as they are referred to each other they are two; but insofar as they are stated with reference to self they are each spirit and they are both together one spirit, they are each mind and both together one mind. (9.2)

Here Augustine deliberately introduces concepts and phrases which remind the reader of books 5–7, thus creating the impression that eventually, yes indeed, Augustine is doing what we expected him to do, namely, construing a similarity between the way we are, and the way God is. Such an endeavour could ultimately solve our problem of not being able to know what God is. This expectation is fulfilled only to a limited extent, however, because Augustine complements the interest in an image with a strong interest in the soteriological aspect of the triad that he developed.

This second problem is introduced immediately after the introduction of the triad. Book 9.4 begins with a summary of the argument developed so far, and then introduces the problem at the end of the sentence:

> Just as you have two somethings, mind and its love, when it loves itself, so you have two somethings, mind and its knowledge, when it knows itself. The mind therefore and its love and knowledge are three somethings, and these three are one thing, *and when they are complete they are equal*. (9.4, see also the last sentence of 9.4)

This is immediately followed by something we can remember from book 8:

> If the mind loves itself less than it is – for example if the mind of a human being loves itself only as much as a human body should be loved though it is itself something more than body – then it sins and its love is not complete. Again if it loves itself more than it is, for example if it loves itself as much as God is to be loved, though it is itself incomparably less than God, here too it sins by excess, and does not have a complete love of itself. It sins of course with even greater perversity and wickedness when it loves the body as much as God is to be loved. Again, if knowledge is less than what is known and can be fully known, then it is not complete. (9.4)

What we see here is that the knowledge and love of the mind are not just a knowledge and love that is neutral or according to the true nature of the thing that is known and loved. Yes, indeed they are, but that true nature is its having been created by God. Thus one loves oneself according to one's real nature only if one loves oneself as created by God. Therefore, as we will more elaborately see in books 9 and 10, love loses its inner unity and becomes desire once the mind begins to love itself as something that it is not.

Thus, we see that the layer of a conceptual image of the Trinity in the mind is interwoven with the layer of a fundamental anthropological structure of the mind, along with an account of the damage sin does to this fundamental structure, by elucidating the dynamics of a trinity in self-love that can be in an original pure state, loving God above all, and a state of sin, loving oneself more than one ought. In 9.5, the question of the conceptual image is taken up once again, and the dynamics seem to fade into the background. Through a number of comparisons, the parallel is construed between the unity in diversity of mind, love, and the knowledge of oneself on the one hand, and the unity in diversity of the Trinity on the other, although the latter is not yet mentioned explicitly:

> At the same time we remind ourselves, if we are at all able to see it, that these things come to light in the soul – where they are, so to say, all rolled up and have to be unrolled in order to be perceived and enumerated – substantially or being-wise, if I may so put it, and not as in a subject, like color or shape in a body, or any other quality or quantity. Whatever is of this nature does not go beyond the subject in which it is; this color, or the shape of this body, cannot belong to another body too. But mind can also love something besides itself with the love it loves itself with. Again mind does not only know itself but many other things as well. Therefore love and knowledge are not in the mind as in a subject, but they too are substantially, just as mind itself is; and even if they are posited relatively to each other, still each of them is its own substance. (9.5)

Augustine clearly construes the relationship between love and knowledge in such a way as to remind the reader of its similarity with the Trinitarian language developed in books 5–7. In the meantime, Augustine seems to pass over an important difference between the Trinity as he described it in books 5–7 and the concept of self-love in book 9. In books 5–7, he does not call Father, Son and Spirit substances and only calls the unity a substance with qualifications. The latter is called the essence and, in the end, Augustine refutes all terms for the three 'persons'. We speak about them in a certain way, but that is because we have to say something, not because we have a concept for them.

Here, in the analysis of self-love, Augustine is quite concerned to prove that all three phenomena are both substances in themselves although also predicated relatively, and one essence according to their unity. This unity, however, can be broken, as we have seen earlier in book 9, which is of course not possible with the unity in the Trinity. Augustine does not seem to be interested in these differences, though, because he does not explicitly touch upon them at all. At the beginning of 9.8, the parallel between Trinity and self-love is well summarized:

> But with these three, when mind knows and loves itself the trinity remains of mind, love, knowledge. Nor are they jumbled up together in any kind of mixture, though they are each one in itself and each whole in their total, whether each in the other two or the other two in each, in any case all in all. Thus mind is of course in itself, since it is called mind with reference to itself, though it is called knowing or known or knowable relative to its knowledge; also as loving and loved or lovable it is referred to the love it loves itself with. And while knowledge is referred to the mind knowing or known, it is also called knowing and known with reference to itself; the knowledge the mind knows itself with cannot be unknown to itself. And while love is referred to the mind loving, whose love it is, nonetheless it is also love with reference to itself, so that it is also in itself, because love too is loved, nor can it be loved with anything but love, that is with itself. (9.8)

Here we have the idea of the second half of *De Trinitate* as a search for an ontological parallel in its most elaborate form. We need not wait long, however, before the quest for a stable ontological parallel between God and the creature is dynamicized again.

It happens immediately afterwards, in 9.9, where a theme is introduced that has bothered interpreters for quite some time: the distinction between the inner and the outer word. It plays a role at two layers of the argument: the introduction of the term 'word' (*verbum*) serves as a hint to the second Person of the Trinity, and, thus, plays a role at the level of the search for a parallel between God and the creation. At the same time, the relationship

between the inner and the outer word is used by Augustine to explain the dynamic character of self-love, both in its original perfection and its corruption in its fallen state. The problem of its restoration remains largely in the background in book 9.

The distinction between the inner and the outer word is introduced in 9.9, but it becomes dominant only later, and it is prepared for in terms of a discussion of our access to norms of truth, the eternal ideas that are in God above the mind. In book 8, we saw that true love requires not only the relation to the other person but also the right relationship to God because it is the relationship to God that makes the person just and thus loving rather than desiring. We saw also that the relationship to things eternal was not so much a relationship of participation but a relationship of access to the good. In 9.9, Augustine begins to reflect on the relationship to eternal things because they influence the way in which the mind knows itself in an appropriate way. Thus, his reflections on the access to eternal truth presuppose his account of self-love as a dynamic unity that is a unity if it is in accordance with the way in which the mind truly is, but falls apart once there is no correspondence between the mind and our knowledge of it.

The first step in this reflection is the introduction of a distinction between knowledge of temporal things and eternal things. One's knowledge of oneself is not knowledge of eternal things because it is not related to the mind in general but to one particular mind:

> But when the human mind knows itself and loves itself, it does not know and love something unchangeable. And a man is acting in one way when it looks at what is going on in himself and speaks to declare his mind; but in quite another when he defines the human mind in terms of specific or generic knowledge. So when he speaks to me about his own particular mind, saying whether he understands this or that or does not understand it, and whether he wishes or does not wish this or that, I believe it. When however he says something true, specifically or generically, about the human mind, I acknowledge and agree with it. (9.9)

In fact what happens here implies a major move away from the Platonic framework. As one reads repeatedly in Plotinus, self-knowledge, that is, the turning inward into one's own soul, is a turning away from one's temporality and gaze upon one's eternal soul, or, more precisely, it is a turning away from one's own soul to the world soul. Hence, self-knowledge in Plotinus is the return from one's individuality to the vision of one's identity in the eternal roots of one's existence. Thus, it is precisely the eternity of the soul that enables the return of human beings to their eternal origin in the world soul, which in turn has its ground in the One.

Augustine breaks with this view, which is not surprising given the fact that he denies the eternity of the soul, but this dramatically changes the character

of self-knowledge. Self-knowledge becomes something dynamic and contingent because it is not a matter of ontological participation that flows immediately from the eternal ideas.

There is a form of access to the eternal ideas, though. These eternal ideas, however, do not consist so much in the forms in which everything exists eternally, although Augustine does not explicitly reject that reading of them,[34] but they consist primarily in the norms on the basis of which we evaluate the truth value of things; that is to say, they provide the norms by which we determine whether things are as they ought to be. That the eternal ideas are not simply ontological matrices of things on earth becomes clear at the beginning of 9.10, where Augustine turns them into norms of judgement even more strongly, because also virtual things can be evaluated in terms of them:

> So too we absorb the images of bodily things through the senses of the body and transfer them somehow to the memory, and from them we fabricate images with which to think about things we have not seen, whether differently from what they actually are or by a chance in a million as they are; but whenever we correctly approve or disapprove of something represented by such images, we have the inescapable conviction that we make our judgment of approval or disapproval within ourselves by altogether different rules which abide unchangeably above our minds. (9.10)

The space that Augustine creates, between the mind as a creaturely phenomenon and the eternal truth above the mind, makes it possible to account for a damaged insight into the eternal truth, although as we have seen in the discussion of book 8 one's access to the norms of goodness will never be lost entirely. Augustine hints at this possibility here again:

> But it does of course make some difference whether I am as it were shut off from the transparent sky under or in that fog, or whether as happens on high mountains I can enjoy the free atmosphere between the two, and look upon the fair light above and the swirling mists below. (9.11)

Now, from 9.12 onwards, after having dealt with our access to the eternal ideas as norms for evaluating the things we see and think, the main layers of the argument become integrated once again: first, the image-layer, in which

[34] I'm aware of the fact that Augustine seems to adhere to a Platonic reading of the eternal ideas elsewhere, but I restrict myself here to what Augustine does with the notion of the eternal ideas in *De Trinitate*. Cf. Phillip Cary, *Augustine's Invention of the Inner Self: The Legacy of a Christian Platonist* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 54–55.

Augustine aims to show that there is an image of the Trinity in the mind, seemingly in terms of a conceptual analogy between the Trinity and the mind. Second, the anthropological layer, in which Augustine aims to show how we have been originally created by God and are intended to live as God's creatures. Finally, the sin-layer, in which he shows how what was originally created is damaged but not entirely lost by sin. The ruling distinction that he uses is new, namely, that of the inner and the outer word, where initially the inner word represents the access to the eternal ideas, whereas the outer word represents the results of thought as they are communicated to the outside:

> Thus it is that in that eternal truth according to which all temporal things were made we observe with the eye of the mind the form according to which we are and according to which we do anything with true and right reason, either in ourselves or in bodies. And by this form we conceive true knowledge of things, which we have with us as a kind of word that we beget by uttering inwardly, and that does not depart from us when it is born. (9.12)

The notion of knowledge as a word becomes rather complicated because it is combined with various other notions and arguments. As this quote makes clear, knowledge is a judgement about the truth value of things in a kind of comparison of temporal things with the eternal things as the mind perceives them. The first complicating issue is that Augustine relates the character of the word that is begotten and born to the nature of love that is involved. Hence, the sort of word that emerges from an act of knowledge, and, thus, the character of the knowledge is influenced by the kind of love involved in our act of knowledge.

As we have seen in book 8, love (most generally: *amor*) is only love (*caritas* or *dilectio*) and not desire (*cupiditas*) if one loves God above all and one's neighbour as oneself. The relationship between true love and knowledge is, as we have also seen in book 8, a reciprocal relationship. Knowledge as such never comes alone, it is always the result of a form of love, a desire (as we would call it and use that term as a neutral one, which Augustine does not do). Therefore, there will be no true knowledge if there is no true love, which is the chicken-or-egg problem as we saw it in book 8. In book 9, we see that these notions are now introduced again, but this time in terms of the distinction between the inner and the outer word:

> This word is conceived in love of either the creature or the creator, that is of changeable nature or unchangeable truth; which means either in covetousness or in charity. Not that the creature is not to be loved, but if that love is related to the creator it will no longer be covetousness but charity. It is only covetousness when the creature is loved on its own account. In this case it does not help you in your use of it, but

> corrupts you in your enjoyment of it. Now a creature can either be on a par with us or lower than us; the lower creature should be used to bring us to God, the creature on a par should be enjoyed, but in God. Just as you ought to enjoy yourself not in yourself but in him who made you, so too with the one whom you love as yourself. Let us then enjoy both ourselves and our brothers in the Lord, and from that level let us not dare to lower ourselves down even to our own, and so slacken off in a downward direction. Now this word is born when on thinking over it we like it either for sinning or for doing good. So love, like something in the middle, joins together our word and the mind it is begotten from, and binds itself in with them as a third element in a non-bodily embrace, without any confusion. (9.13)

First, we see here the common way of construing the relationship between love and desire as found in book 8, parallel to the well-known distinction between use and enjoyment (*uti* and *frui*) that is most well known from the beginning of *De doctrina christiana*. The general background is the New Testament summary of the Decalogue, combined with notions from the First Letter of John. The word born is then said to lead either to sin or to doing justice. Whether the word itself is affected by sin is not explicitly touched upon here, but it seems that the statement that one needs to know and to see oneself as one really is – at the beginning of book 9, and the remark in 9.11 that there may be fog between the mind and the eternal ideas – suggests that knowledge as the word begotten and born are indeed affected by either love or desire. In the next chapter, when we deal with the trinity of intellect, will and memory, we will see that this is indeed the case. Nevertheless, throughout the second half of *De Trinitate*, Augustine will insist on the fundamental availability of the knowledge of the good as the inner word, otherwise, as he already argued in book 8, how could someone who is not yet just, love to be just, if that person did not already know what it is to be just?

In 9.14, a final complicating factor is added to the argument. So far, we have seen that the word is the mind's comparison of the thing known with the eternal norms of truth. The will was then bound to the word appearing from the mind in making it either an act of love or of desire. However, Augustine further complicates matters by employing the distinction between love and desire in a second way that, while being very close to the first, remains different. The first distinction says that, when you love God above all and love creaturely things as it were embedded in the love of God, you are on the right track. Desire comes in when you love a creaturely thing with the love that only God deserves. In 9.14, however, Augustine relates the notions of love and the word begotten and born to either eternal or creaturely things in a new way:

> But the conceived word and the born word are the same thing when the will rests in the act itself of knowing, which happens in the love of

> spiritual things. For example, someone who perfectly loves justice is thereby already just even if no occasion exists for him to do justice externally in bodily activity. But in the love of temporal and material things the conception of a word is one thing and its birth another, as it is with the breeding of animals. In this case the word is conceived by wanting and born by getting, as it is not enough for greed to know and love money unless it also has it, or to know and love eating or copulating unless it also does them, or to know and love honors and political power unless they are also forthcoming. (9.14)

The word can now not only be the product of either love or desire, but there may also be a distinction between the word begotten and the word born. This is only possible in the love of temporal things because in loving righteousness it is righteousness itself which is strived after, so that having that righteousness is having attained what one desired to attain. Desiring to have something temporal, however, is not the same as having it at hand.

What exactly the theological point is of this last distinction is not very clear because the argument is broken off rather suddenly after 9.14. There would be a problem of course if the word begotten and the word born would not be the same in the image of the Trinity because these apparently need to be the same in Christ as the Word of the Father. But as we have seen, an argument that serves the idea of self-love as an image of the Trinity often also serves as an argument on the level of anthropology, or soteriology. There, the point seems to be that the soul will only find rest in the love of God, not in the sense that the love of creaturely things is wrong as such, but in the sense that the rest found in God will make sure that creaturely things are dealt with in the appropriate way. Augustine puts it like this later on, in book 11.

From 9.15 and onwards, Augustine begins to remove various sorts of objections to the idea that there is a trinity in the mind between mind, the word begotten from it, and love binding them together. In 9.15, the objection is that not all knowledge might be a word because we also know things which we disapprove. Augustine then argues that we disapprove of things because of a lack, a *privatio*, from which it follows that we disapprove of things because they are not what they ought to be and, therefore, in fact love approves the things as they ought to be.

In 9.16, Augustine addresses the objection of the equality of the mind, knowledge and love triad. Is not the mind more than the knowledge of it, or the love between them? He takes the notion of knowledge as something of a likeness to what is known to argue for the equality of mind and knowledge. If we know God, we become a bit like God, as the principle of knowledge as identity of subject and object of knowledge suggests, but Augustine immediately uses it to argue that in the case of knowledge of God, the knowledge is in a mind that is lower than Godself, and thus there is no equality between the knowledge of God and God that is known. The same goes for our knowledge

of material objects, but there the situation is in the reverse. There, the knowledge is in a better nature, the mind, and thus is the knowledge better than the thing known. The upshot is that in self-knowledge, the mind and the knowledge of it are perfectly equal. This of course helps to prove Augustine's point in books 5–7, where he argued extensively for the equality of the Father and the Son.

In 9.17–18, theological questions still dominate a discussion that at first might seem philosophical in character. Here, Augustine tries to prove that love is not begotten by the mind as knowledge is but is rather the bond between the mind and the knowledge of it. This argument is motivated, as Augustine explicitly states, by the question of why the Holy Spirit is not the second Son of the Father, rather than the bond of love between Father and Son. Augustine counters the suggestion that love is as much the 'son' of the mind as knowledge. His most important argument is that love is in fact the requirement for every act of knowledge, and thus independent of it, being the bond between the mind that loves itself and the knowledge of it through which it loves itself:

> So parturition by the mind is preceded by a kind of appetite which prompts us to inquire and find out about what we want to know, and as a result knowledge itself is brought forth as offspring; and hence the appetite itself by which knowledge is conceived and brought forth cannot appropriately itself be called brood or offspring. The same appetite with which one longs open-mouthed to know a thing becomes love of the thing known when it holds and embraces the acceptable offspring, that is knowledge, and joins it to its begetter. (9.18)

The book closes with the conclusion that there is a trinity between the mind, love and the knowledge of oneself in which all are one, still distinct substances, and all equal.

Let me close this discussion of book 9 with a brief reflection of what we have found and of the rhetorics employed in this book. What we have found is an interest in developing an image, that is, an interest in developing the suggestion that the conceptual structure of self-love might teach us something of the conceptual structure of the Trinity.

The question is now what is the purpose of such an analysis? The purpose is not, in my mind, to explain the concept of Trinity. The analysis is at best intended to give the concept of a Trinity some initial plausibility. The reason why this is so is that the resemblance between the Trinity and this trinity in the image is much too loose and poorly developed. A major critique of the idea of the persons in the Trinity as three separate substances is now followed by a trinity consisting of three different substances as if there is no problem involved at all. If a conceptual resemblance had been Augustine's purpose, he would have written a different book 9! A second reason why a conceptual

resemblance is not Augustine's primary purpose is that he does not analyse a 'something' in creaturely reality but a spiritual phenomenon: love. Hence, although it might initially seem that Augustine is developing an analogy between the nature of God and the nature of the soul, there is in fact no difference between book 8 and 9, in that both develop an analogy between God who is Trinity and an *act* in human beings.

A brief reminder of the rhetorics of Augustine's argument is apropos. More than anywhere else in *De Trinitate* and perhaps even in his oeuvre as a whole, Augustine uses the rhetorical technique of suspension here, which is part of the reason why these books are so complicated, meandering and tiresome to read. The argument is developed in terms of long series of questions, possible lines of thought that are then broken off because they prove unconvincing. Subsequently, alternative lines are being developed and finally conclusions are drawn in such a way that it remains not at all clear what they will lead to.

What does suspension do here, rhetorically? It creates expectation and tension, a tension waiting to be resolved. This confirms my argument concerning the purpose of the image of God in self-love. What Augustine attempts to do rhetorically is to develop a Christian anthropology that is *prima facie* close to common Platonic anthropologies. This anthropology consists of a major tension between the original or ultimate perfection of the image of the Trinity and its current postlapsarian state. We see Augustine move constantly back and forth between sketching an attractive ideal, in which the tendency to pride on the part of his intellectual readership is pleased by the suggestion that they will be like God, and a much less attractive confrontation with the present situation, in which the mind has become carnal and unfit for the vision of God. The more or less overt purpose of this tension is to reinforce it to such an extent as to make it unbearable, so that Christ can be presented as the solution to its restoration.

4.6. Book 10: A Theory and Theology of Self-Knowledge

The first thing to note about book 10 is the transition between books 9 and 10, since there is in fact hardly any transition. There is no separate introduction to book 10, and the only remark about the division between them is Augustine's intention to 'explain this same point more thoroughly' (*Nunc ad ea ipsa consequenter enodatius explicanda limatior accedat intentio*; 10.1). Given that there was no metareflection either on the flow of the argument at the end of book 9, we can presume that these are structurally and rhetorically tightly integrated books. The argument at the beginning of book 10 immediately follows the end of book 9, even taking up the point developed in 9.18, namely, the insight developed there of a desire to know as the prerequisite for

every act of knowledge. We see here another example of rhetorical technique and the filling in of suspension. It will appear in this book again: Augustine closes a book with the introduction of a new theme, creating expectations and awakening interest in knowing what this new theme might add to the investigation of the main problem. The next book is used to sort this out. Here it happens with the notion of the desire to know that precedes the love of the thing known. At the end of book 10 the same happens with the introduction of the triad that will dominate book 11, the trinity between intellect, memory and will.

As I have discussed in section 4.2, book 10 is among the most intensively debated books of the whole work. People have found in it the Cartesian *cogito*, a Fichtian theory of self-consciousness, and the origin of secular modernity. In many cases, as I have already argued above, the interpretation of book 10 suffers from the fact that many interpreters read from a frame of reference in which the flow of Augustine's own argument is of only secondary importance. This is not a problem as such. For example, it is perfectly valid to read book 10 in an attempt to see how it foreshadows a Cartesian *cogito*. But still, such a purpose might push the question of the place of such an alleged 'cogito' in Augustine's own argument a bit into the background. Thus, one might say with a fashionable expression, that book 10 is a bit 'overhyped'. It holds an important place in the secondary literature, more than it does in Augustine's own argument.

In fact, book 10 is a book in transition, a transition between the account of self-knowledge developed in book 9 and the discussion of the trinity of *memoria, intelligentia* and *voluntas* in book 11. As such, within the larger context of the second half of *De Trinitate*, it marks the transition from the discussion of the inner man to the outer man. Phrased alternatively, it marks the transition from the discussion of the first two levels of Augustine's fundamental anthropology, in which he argues for the original state of human beings, and outlines the corruption of that state through sin, and the third level, on which he develops a soteriological account of how, through faith in Christ, human beings can return to their original happiness. It is for this reason that Augustine introduces the trinity of memory, understanding and will because it provides the basis of how the health of the soul and the restoration of it are related to external things, including faith in Christ.

The first main part of book 10 concerns with the investigation of what we do when we desire to know something, because we cannot look for something that we do not already know. This ends with the centre of this book, 10.7, where Augustine presents the kernel of his account of self-knowledge and explains how it is related to the loss of self-knowledge that human beings experience.

Books 10.1 to 10.6, then, attempt to show that there is no thing that we desire to know, that we do not already know in some way or another. The aim of this argument is to show that we know ourselves and that our lack of

knowledge of ourselves cannot be ascribed to a true lack of it, as if we had to regain something that we lost, but our lack of self-knowledge has to do with our way of dealing with ourselves. We could know ourselves, and we in fact do, but we do not handle that knowledge appropriately. Of course in arguing on the basis of the insight that we cannot love anything that we do not know, Augustine takes up an insight that he developed in book 8, where it was applied to the knowledge of God. Now it is applied to self-love.

In the meantime, however, numerous other interesting things happen, as we have already seen, namely, that Augustine keeps his readers busy with a dense reflection packed with insights. The first striking thing that we encounter in this book is the notion of beauty (*pulchritudo*). As I have already shown when dealing with book 8, truth and goodness were dealt with there, but beauty only implicitly. Truth was suddenly broken off in book 8, as the heart is thrown back from that impermeable light by the uncleanliness of sin and its bonds to matter. It reappeared in book 9, where it was suggested that we determine the truth of things by looking at the eternal principles. Here in book 10, beauty appears right at the beginning of the book:

> Even over matters where we do not usually talk about studiousness, love commonly results from hearing; thus the spirit is roused by talk of someone's beauty to go and see and enjoy it, since it has a general knowledge of physical beauty, having seen many examples of it, and has something inside by which to judge and approve of what it hungers for outside. (10.1)

It appears in passing, in an exposition of different ways in which we know something of the things we desire to know. Still it can hardly be a coincidence that truth and goodness took centre stage in books 8 and 9, and beauty in book 10, although the relationship between the three transcendentals is nowhere explicitly dealt with. This is once more an illustration of the thickness of Augustine's approach: all sorts of notions, traditions and arguments are interwoven to create an impression of bedazzlement.

This very same quote, however, affirms another issue that we have touched on in the discussion of book 9 and which is very significant for the relationship between Augustine and Platonism. What we see here is that knowledge in general is gathered from experience rather than from one's participation in the spiritual realm, whereas the normative evaluation through which we approve or disprove of what we know, comes from within, that is, from the eternal principles.

Since all the emphasis is put on showing the structure of the mind and self-love, eventually intended to convince the reader of the necessity of salvation in Christ, here Augustine is already preparing the reader for things to come. In the emphasis on hearsay as a crucial way of gaining knowledge based on authority (faith, *fides quaerens intellectum*), he is preparing the reader for

book 12 onwards, where belief on the basis of hearsay and authority/revelation provides the means for the return of the sinful human being to the true knowledge and vision of God.

In the two sections which follow, 10.2 and 10.3, Augustine provides a lengthy argument in favour of the fact that no one really loves something that he or she does not already know. Especially 10.2 is lengthy. It discusses the example of someone hearing an unknown word spoken – the Latin word *temetum* – and examines the nature of the desire to know the meaning of this word. The discussion shows something of Augustine's own passion for the spoken and written word and the desire to study it almost for its sake, firmly embedded in his ardent search for truth: 'But as it knows that this is not just a vocal sound but also a sign, it wants to know it completely; and no sign is completely known unless it is known what thing it is the sign of' (10.2). It is not the thing behind the sign, however, that the studious mind of languages loves and seeks to know, but the communicative value of language as a way out of human solitude, as Augustine makes clear in this beautiful quote:

> So what does he love then? It must be that he knows and sees by insight in the very sense of things how beautiful the discipline is that contains knowledge of all signs; and how useful the skill is by which a human society communicates perceptions between its members, since otherwise an assembly of human beings would be worse for its members than any kind of solitude, if they could not exchange their thoughts by speaking to each other. This then is the lovely and useful form which the soul discerns and knows and loves, and anyone who inquires about the meaning of any words he does not know is studiously trying to perfect it in himself as far as he can; for it is one thing to observe it in the light of truth, another to desire to have it at one's disposal. What one observes in the light of truth is what a great and good thing it would be to understand and speak all the languages of all peoples, and so to hear nobody as a foreigner, and to be heard by no one as such either. (10.2)

At the end of 10.4, this argument is closed and the transition made to the central theme of the book, self-knowledge:

> But if you look at the matter carefully I think I have truly made out the case for saying that in fact it is otherwise, and nothing at all is loved if it is unknown. However, the examples I have given are of people wanting to know something which they are not themselves; so we must see if some new issue does not arise when the mind desires to know itself. (10.4)

Of course, there is a difference between the desire to know oneself and the desire to know other things because to know oneself seems *prima facie*

trivial: after all, one *is* oneself so what could be more natural than to know oneself? Things are not that easy, though, because our experience teaches us that we are often not completely transparent to ourselves and thus seek to know who we are. But for what, Augustine asks, do we search when we try to know ourselves? If we love to know ourselves but do not yet do so, what do we love, because one cannot love something that one does not know. At the beginning of 10.5, Augustine goes through a number of options. An interesting one appears when he suggests that the mind might love to know itself according to an image it makes from itself, rather than the self it actually is. This notion of images will play a crucial role in the argument to come:

> Perhaps then it does not love itself, but loves something it has imagined about itself, very different perhaps from what it really is. Or it may be that what the mind imagines itself as being is really like itself, and so when it loves this image it is loving itself before it knows itself, because it is looking at what is like itself; in this case it knows other minds from which it forms an image of itself, and so it is already known to itself in general terms. (10.5)

We see again something of Augustine's rhetorical strategy. This option is introduced in the midst of a number of others, and nothing – at this moment in the argument – suggests that it is more important than the others. In due course, however, we will see that this is what Augustine sees as the primary illness of the sinful mind and the root of its fundamental anxiety.

Subsequently, Platonism or at least strands and notions from it appear in two versions. The first is this one:

> Can it be that it sees in the canon of eternal truth how beautiful it is to know oneself, and that it loves this thing that it sees and is at pains to bring it about in itself, because although it does not know itself, it knows how good it would be to know itself? But this is passing strange, not yet to know oneself, and already to know how beautiful it is to know oneself. (10.5)

The soul sees the beauty of self-knowledge above itself, in the eternal truth, and thus strives after it on that basis. This bears a strong similarity to the Platonic tendency to find the unity and reflective act of self-knowledge in something that transcends the soul, through which the soul then ascends to that unity. However, Augustine argues, this comes down to a *petitio principii* because it requires what it tries to reach, namely, self-knowledge. For the statement: '*x* sees how excellent it is to know himself', *x* needs to know himself because what he sees is the evaluative judgement, namely, how excellent that is. Then, Platonism appears again:

> Perhaps then the mind sees some excellent end, that is its own security and happiness, through some obscure memory which has not deserted it on its travels to far countries and it believes it can only reach this end by knowing itself. Thus while it loves this end it seeks knowledge of itself, and it is on account of the known thing it loves that it seeks the unknown. But why in this case could the memory of its happiness remain with it while the memory of itself could not, so that as well as knowing that which it wants to reach it might also know itself who wants to reach? (10.5)

This is the same process of an intellectual ascent, where the soul discovers its inner unity through the vision of the beauty of transcendent non-material unity in the world soul, and ultimately the One. It is now combined with the idea of the soul as having descended into matter and having only a very limited remembrance of its own original unity and self-transparency to which it then returns by self-love. Again, Augustine refutes this solution to self-knowledge, basically on the same grounds as the former solution, because if one remembers something, namely, the knowledge of oneself, to be blessed, one needs to know the thing that one remembers.

The course along proposed solutions to the problem continues for some time in 10.5 and 10.6. The idea that one loves knowing in general and bothers about not knowing oneself is refuted because loving to know in general presupposes self-knowledge. In 10.6, Augustine extensively refutes the possibility that the mind knows itself partly. In 10.7, the final solution appears with a firm statement right at the beginning of the section:

> Why then is the mind commanded to know itself? I believe it means that it should think about itself and live according to its nature, that is it should want to be placed according to its nature, under him it should be subject to and over all that it should be in control of; under him it should be ruled by, over all that it ought to rule. (10.7)

This quote is packed with insights and clues into Augustine's theology and philosophy. We have already come across may of them earlier in books 8 and 9, but here they appear in conjunction and combined with the kind of psychology that Augustine is about to develop in the rest of the book. As always in this part of *De Trinitate*, every key passage marks a transition from one key theme to the other.

Let me repeat with the first main sentence in the old PNF translation 'I suppose, in order that, it may consider itself, and live according to its own nature; that is, seek to be regulated according to its own nature, viz., under Him to whom it ought to be subject, and above those things to which it is to be preferred; under Him by whom it ought to be ruled, above those things which it ought to rule' (10.7). The first word in the Latin original is 'Credo'. The old PNF

translation has it as 'I suppose', whereas Hill translates more literally with 'I believe' – the rest of the sentence is much more literally translated in the old PNF translation.

I think the 'Credo' at the beginning of the sentence is much more significant than 'I suppose' makes clear. It is true that Augustine often introduces his own solution to a problem with an understatement, like a question introduced by 'Might it not be that . . .' which as such could have been the case here as well. I doubt it, however, because I think the use of *credere* as it used here has a special significance and meaning. All the foregoing has been argument, strict argument, even logical argument. Now, at the beginning of his own view, Augustine starts with the significant use of *credere*, which in Augustine's thought is to be clearly distinguished from *cognoscere* or *novi*. This as such will be a major theme in books 12 onwards. Faith is concerned with things not yet seen, not yet transparent to the mind and to believe is thus to rely on contingency, to rely on things you cannot provide a knock-down argument for. Hence, Augustine can show by argument that the mind knows that which it loves, but he does not try to prove that what he suggests here is something that can be deduced from reason. Hence, in suggesting that the mind's thinking and living according to its own nature is to be found in submission to God and submission of everything below the mind under the rule of that mind is not something one can prove. It is to be accepted on the basis of authority, on hearsay.

This, I think, is very consistent with the rest of *De Trinitate*. In book 13, for example, Augustine explicitly notes that he cannot prove that human beings' happiness can be found in the enjoyment of God. At the beginning of *De Trinitate*, as we have seen in Chapter 1, Augustine strongly emphasizes the need for revelation as a means to salvation, and it will be in this very same book 10, that we are dealing with, that he shows the mind to be entangled in a web of confusions about its own constitution.

Hence, the *credo* means Augustine cannot argue for his point entirely on the basis of reason, since reason here cannot be taken for granted. Of course, as he is a good rhetor, this does not mean that Augustine does not make an appeal to reason to convince his readers of the plausibility of his view of human beings' key to happiness and the good life. Still, and here we enter the second crucial insight to be gained from this first sentence, the constitution of the self and the way to enjoying its true nature is not to be located at the level of the ontological constitution of the mind. It is not because the mind, attempting to think of itself as an inner unity in self-consciousness, realizes that the condition of possibility for the constitution of its self-consciousness is a transcendent unity preceding the act of self-knowledge, as recent readings of book 10 suggest. In fact, as Augustine has argued before, the mind actually knows itself independent from an appeal to transcendence. Self-knowledge as such is a given that we all work with even without realizing it.

This becomes all the more clear when we pay attention to the rest of the sentence. The submission to God and the reign of the things of lesser value than the mind is not intended to enable self-knowledge or self-consciousness at all. It is intended to make the mind deal with (*cogitare*) itself and live according to its own nature. The emphasis is on acting in life and a meta-act of considering oneself in the right way, not the given of self-knowledge as such. In addition, the way to arrive at this true consideration of oneself and living according to one's nature is not an act of recognition or an intellectual insight that makes us see that there is a prior unity underlying my act of self-knowledge, as Platonism or strands of German Idealism have it. Rather, it is letting God reign in one's life and bring one's whole life under the government of God and God's commandments. Of course this is in fact what we have seen all the time, as the submission under God's reign and the reign of one's life under God's reign is nothing but loving God above all and one's neighbour as oneself. Thus, the limitation of the mind (*begrenzte Vernunft*, as it is called in German) is not the topic of Augustine's argument here. It is even explicitly denied.

This brings me to a further issue that follows from this sentence, and that is, that in this account of the true way of dealing with oneself, there is no upward movement as is typical of the Platonic tradition. The ultimate destiny of the mind is characterized by submission to a transcendent God, but the kernel of this destiny is the opposite to the one in the Platonic tradition. The destiny is not to leave behind one's bounds to matter, discover one's divine soul and return to one's origins in, ultimately, the One, but the destiny is exactly, as we will see in more detail below, *not* to try to see oneself as divine, but remain in one's proper relationship to God, namely, a position of obedience to God's reign. The previous quotation is immediately followed by this:

> In fact many of the things it does show that it has twisted its desires the wrong way round as though it had forgotten itself. Thus, for example, it sees certain inner beauties in that more excellent nature which is God; but instead of staying still and enjoying them as it ought to, it wants to claim them for itself, and rather than be like him by his gift it wants to be what he is by its own right. So it turns away from him and slithers and slides down into less and less which is imagined to be more and more; it can find satisfaction neither in itself nor in anything else as it gets further away from him who alone can satisfy it. So it is that in its destitution and distress it becomes excessively intent on its own actions and the disturbing pleasures it culls from them; being greedy to acquire knowledge of all sorts from things outside itself, which it loves as known in a general way and feels can easily be lost unless it takes great care to hold onto them, it loses its carefree sense of security, and thinks of itself all the less the more secure it is in its sense that it cannot lose itself. (10.7)

Again a number of things are remarkable in this quotation: First of all, we see here that disrespecting the reign of God and one's creaturely status is the reason why one falls from one's original purity to the bounds of matter. Not forgetting about one's divine spark makes one stick to matter, but the fall is caused by one's hubris of thinking that one is divine on one's own rather than to recognize one's creaturely status. Secondly, we see here that the idea of the mind, which collects its knowledge of itself from images it gathers from others or from its own imagination (see above, in the discussion of 10.5), is now designated as the primary reason why the mind is unable to deal with itself according to its own nature. This then leads to anxiety and desire introducing a deep psychology in which desire, anxiety and unrest are intimately connected to one's fundamental way of dealing with oneself.

Theologically, this deep psychology is used to increase the pressure upon the reader who is not yet committed to Christianity. If the true health of the mind is in its love of God and one's neighbour as oneself, then Christianity is the way to go, and one's inability to reach that health puts pressure on the not yet Christian to believe in Christ as the means to salvation.

Philosophically, the deep psychology is used to reinforce – not yet prove – Augustine's defence of the incorporality of the soul. Augustine directly suggests that certain philosophical schools suggest the materiality of the soul – Stoicism – because of mistakenly taking the conceptuality belonging to the material world for the conceptuality of the mind or even the soul:

> But it is also in the things that it thinks about with love, and it has got used to loving sensible, that is bodily things; so it is unable to be in itself without their images. Hence arises its shameful mistake, that it cannot make itself out among the images of the things it has perceived with the senses, and see itself alone; they are all stuck astonishingly fast together with the glue of love. And this is its impurity, that while it attempts to think of itself alone, it supposes itself to be that without which it is unable to think of itself. (10.11)

Thus, it is through sin that the soul begins to think of itself as material, Augustine suggests. In this critique of the Stoic view of the soul, Augustine is on par with Platonism, and in 10.11–13, we see a strong emphasis on freeing the soul from the material images that keep it occupied and its true nature hidden.

From 10.13 onwards, we see Augustine's characteristic rhetorical technique of suspension appear again. At first sight, it seems as if the theme that dominates the discussion is still that of the certainty of self-knowledge, and until the end of 10.16, it is. In 10.14, we get the famous *si dubitat, cogitat* that seems to foreshadow Descartes's famous dictum, but in the meantime, the new theme has already been introduced:

> Again they know that they will, and they know likewise that no one can do this who does not be and does not live, and again they relate

> this will to something that they want with this will. They also know that they remember, and at the same time they know that no one would remember unless he was and unless he lived. This memory too we relate to something that we remember with it. Two of these three, memory and understanding, contain the awareness and knowledge of many things; will is there for us to enjoy them or use them. (10.13)

The line of argument is still the discourse on the certainty of self-knowledge. The context is the case of those who believe the soul to be material in some way or another, and Augustine defends his view of the certainty of self-knowledge by suggesting that even those who think of the soul in a material way still have the certainty of self-knowledge. In between other things that all human beings are certain of and know for sure, memory, understanding and will are mentioned as things that all will admit that they possess in the mind. Initially, they are mentioned as based on the memory and knowledge of external things. This will also be the context in which Augustine most elaborately discusses them in book 11. But the introduction of the role of external things in salvation is pushed into the background for some time at the beginning of 10.14 returning to the central issues of self-knowledge and the certainty thereof:

> But we are concerned now with the nature of mind; so let us put aside all consideration of things we know outwardly through the senses of the body, and concentrate our attention on what we have stated that all minds know for certain about themselves. (10.14)

What follows then is one of the famous *cogito* passages, not with *cogitare* in this case, but with *dubitare*:

> Nobody surely doubts, however, that he lives and remembers and understands and wills and thinks and knows and judges. At least, even if he doubts, he lives; if he doubts, he remembers why he is doubting; if he doubts, he understands he is doubting; if he doubts, he has a will to be certain; if he doubts, he thinks; if he doubts, he knows he does not know; if he doubts, he judges he ought not to give a hasty assent. You may have your doubts about anything else, but you should have no doubts about these; if they were not certain, you would not be able to doubt anything. (10.14)

So far, Augustine's argument has taken the course of showing that even those who think of the mind/soul in a material way could not doubt that it knows itself. At the culmination point of the argument in favour of self-knowledge and the certainty of it, however, he reverses the argument. Pointing at those who believe in the materiality of the soul, he says:

> But what none of them notice is that the mind knows itself even when it is looking for itself, as we have shown above. Now properly speaking

> a thing cannot in any way be said to be known while its substance is unknown. Therefore when mind knows itself it knows its substance, and when it is certain of itself it is certain of its substance. But it is certain of itself, as everything said above convincingly demonstrates. Nor is it in the least certain whether it is air or fire or any kind of body or anything appertaining to body. Therefore it is not any of these things. (10.16)

All goals have been reached at this point. The materiality of the mind has been refuted, and the certainty of self-knowledge has been proven.

It is perhaps worthwhile to recapitulate briefly why all this was necessary. As I have argued, Augustine tries to convince those on the borderline of Christianity, who have a strong interest in pagan philosophy, that Christianity is the way to go. On a first level, he does this by arguing for a fundamental anthropological structure in which human beings are happy and in order only when they follow their true nature, which is their submission to God as the highest good and the source and aim of our highest love, paralleled to the love of neighbour as oneself. On a second level, he shows the corruption of this structure through sin, and thus, the loss of self-knowledge as *cogitatio*, prompting if not forcing his readers to seek for a return to that original happiness in love of God and one's neighbour as oneself.

Book 10 has made an attempt to prove these points up to the point of absolute certainty, or as book 1 put it: beyond any doubt (1.4). Against those scholars with an exclusively philosophical interest in self-knowledge and self-certainty, it might be good to remind of the fact that book 10 is not the only point where Augustine tries to argue for his view beyond any doubt. Such a point will return in book 13, where he will argue for the fact that we all long for ultimate happiness that reaches beyond death. But still, book 10 is one of such places where Augustine tries to fulfil the promise made in book 1.

As I have suggested already several times, book 10 is a book in transition. Now that all of the aims of books 9–10 have been reached, it is time to prepare for things to come, namely, the third level, on which the reader is to be prepared for faith in Christ as the only way to return to our original happiness. The first sentences of 10.17 mark the slight arbitrariness of the transition to the triad of memory, understanding and will: 'Now let us put aside for the moment the other things which the mind is certain about as regards itself, and just discuss these three, memory, understanding, and will' (10.17). Johannes Brachtendorf suggests that the move from the discussion of self-knowledge and self-certainty to memory, understanding and will is based on the fact that these are the things that the mind is certain of.[35] However, this suggestion hides the fact of the arbitrariness of the choice for these

[35] Brachtendorf, *Struktur des menschlichen Geistes*, 181.

three, rather than all those that Augustine mentioned before, being and living, for example. Brachtendorf's line of reasoning also hides the strongly rhetorical character of Augustine's argument. What we find is not a dry philosopher's logic but the smooth construction of the rhetor, who knows where he wants to direct his reasoning to and selects his themes at will to reach that purpose.

There is an additional reason, however, to interrupt this connection between self-knowledge and self-certainty on the one hand, and the triad of memory, intellect and will on the other. It seems to me, upon further reflection on the relationship between the two sides of Augustine's argument in book 10, that it turns out that the *se nosse* as self-knowledge precedes the structure of memory, understanding and will, because it is not part of the intentional nature of memory, understanding and will. It is important to note that the certainty of remembering, understanding and willing (the verbs are used here on purpose, as actions, not faculties of the mind) is not based on the certainty of the *se nosse*, but on the certainty of consensus (10.13) and of existence (10.14). Given that I exist, live and understand, nobody will deny that I remember, understand, and the will binds these two together. The certainty of this presupposes that I know myself in the sense of the *se nosse*, but remembering, understanding and willing are not as such derived from this, because they belong to the realm of the *se cogitare*.[36]

The connection between the two key themes of book 10, therefore, remains very loose, and it is now made even looser in 10.18. It is as if Augustine suddenly remembers that he had in mind to suggest to his readers that he was in search for images of the Trinity in the realm of the mind and forgot to present his argument in book 10 as such, whereas it very much dominated the argument in book 9. One section before the end of book 10, our desire for pictures is satisfied with an explanation of the triad of memory, understanding and will along the lines of the Trinitarian dogma:

> These three then, memory, understanding, and will, are not three lives but one life, nor three minds but one mind. So it follows of course that they are not three substances but one substance. When memory is called life, and mind, and substance, it is called so with reference to itself; but when it is called memory it is called so with reference to another. I can say the same about understanding and will; both understanding and will are so called with reference to another. But each of them is life and mind and being with reference to itself. For this reason these three are one in that they are one life, one mind, one being; and whatever else they are called together with reference to self, they are called it in the singular, not in the plural. But they are three in that they

[36] Cf. also 11.6, where an act of knowledge through perception is explicitly described as *cogitatio*.

> have reference to each other. And if they were not equal, not only each to the other but also each to them all together, they would not of course contain each other. In fact though they are not only each contained by each, they are all contained by each as well. (10.18)

The reader here is struck once again by the loose way of dealing with the analogy. In the triad of self-love in book 9, it was still completely obvious to speak of three substances, mind, the knowledge of it and the love of oneself, whereas here, it is stressed that the three faculties of the mind belong to one single essence, the mind. In both cases, Augustine speaks of an *imago Trinitatis*, although in the first case, he admits that the image is not itself concerned with something eternal (9.9). In addition, in both cases he construes them as an obvious parallel to the way the Trinity is construed in books 5–7 without explaining why in the first case one is free to suggest that there are three substances, and in the other, one is not.

A similar ambiguity can be found at the very end of the book, where Augustine makes the move towards the next book. He suggests to take an easier route towards explaining the image of the Trinity, through an analysis of sense perception:

> Are we already then in a position to rise with all our powers of concentration to that supreme and most high being of which the human mind is the unequal image, but the image nonetheless? Or have we still to clarify the distinctions between these three in the soul by comparing them with our sensitive grasp of things outside, in which the awareness of bodily things is imprinted on us in a time sequence? (10.19)

In fact, however, much more is at stake. As I have already suggested, the transition to external knowledge and sense perception prepares for soteriology because it is eventually through faith in external things, namely, Christ, that the image of God is restored to its original state.

4.7. Between Augustine and Systematic Theology

The analysis of books 8 to 10 has been long and the significance of it for systematic theology may not be obvious, perhaps because the areas for which Augustine's argument in these books could be significant are diverse and the significance profound. In the next section, I will try to elaborate on the significance of Augustine's argument for contemporary theological anthropology through a comparison between Augustine's and Wolfhart Pannenberg's anthropology. But before we are ready for this step, I think it will help the reader to have a bridge between Augustine and the contemporary discussion, so as to summarize the findings of books 8–10, put them also

into the overall context of my argument, and thus bring the systematic potential of Augustine's anthropology more clearly to the fore.

The first theme that arose from book 8 was the relationship between God and the world, and the distinction between a Platonic and Augustine's way of construing this relationship. The decisive issue was that in Platonism the ascent towards the One is one of a movement on a scale. Everyone is always in the One but not always one with the One. Still, even if one is not in the state of perfect unity, the presence of the soul in a human being provides a kind of default route – reason – through which one can return to perfect unity. Augustine, as we saw, breaks with this route into the divine. God is over against the world and the world is not God. This means that there is no default route, although the creation bears a number of traces of the presence of God in it. Who God is, however, is not known by default, and thus the access to God can be severely obscured.

This point fits well into my overall argument. In the first chapter, I have argued for basically the same point by showing that a Platonic account of the One cannot offer a true transcendence of the One, as the One as the Absolute swallows up everything. Although epistemologically, the One is beyond thought and in that sense, strongly transcendent, ontologically, everything that is is in terms of participation in the One. Augustine criticizes this concept of the One ultimately as a form of projection, because one comes to this concept of the One by extrapolating from one's own way of being, filling the concept as it were through the denial of all we know.

The doctrine of creation, that Augustine puts in between God and the world, destroys the idea of God as the One and thus the Absolute. This fits into my argument in Chapter 2, where I argued that God as Trinity, as Augustine sees it, leads to God as a concrete essence, who, however, cannot be aligned in any way to a worldly category of existence and, thus, can only be spoken of from concrete experience. This, then, makes the second half of *De Trinitate* so hard for Augustine to construe. If there had been any straightforward route towards God, the second half of the work would not have been necessary, but now there seems to be no obvious way of introducing non-believers to the Christian God, which corresponds to the emphasis on external authority that we already found at the beginning of *De Trinitate*.

What this offers, anthropologically, is what we may call a *Trinitarian* anthropology. It is not a Trinitarian anthropology in the sense that what a human being is, or the way a human being is constituted, displays some structural resemblance to the way God is. Quite the contrary. The Trinitarian structure is guaranteed precisely by the fact that no such resemblance exists. The Trinitarian structure, as far as it is based on an external relation, is constituted by the fact that its key relationship consists in a relationship to an entity that is ineffable and incomprehensible. One can know God, but one cannot align God to anything in the created order. Therefore, one cannot reduce the relationship that constitutes human beings (i.e. the relationship

to God) primarily to a relationship to something in the creaturely realm, other human beings, for example.

Thus, what constitutes human beings is, first of all, and fundamentally, a relationship to God, which is a relationship that cannot be rationally reconstructed and, therefore, cannot be represented in anything from the created order. Thus, secondary relationships, namely, those to other human beings and to oneself, remain determined by a relationship that stands 'in between' the relationship to others and to oneself. This relationship 'in between' guarantees that the other two retain their unique character because there is no relationship that can be reduced to one of the others. This precludes a dialectical view of 'being in relation' because every relationship to something 'other' is codetermined by a second 'Other' that escapes the dialectics of the two relata in the creaturely realm.

The nature of the primary relationship to God determines the quality of the secondary relationships. If the relationship to God is proper, that is, if love is not desire and, thus, God is present through the Holy Spirit in one's life, then the relationship to other human beings will also be in order, and one will also live in peace with oneself. This highlights another key difference from contemporary relational thought: the quality of the relationship to creaturely things, either to oneself or to another, is not determined by a focus on one of either poles. As we will see below, for Pannenberg, human beings are fundamentally in order when they recognize their dependence on others, which means that the quality of the relationship resides in the dialectical relationship between oneself and another as such, where the quality is determined by a focus on one of the two poles. If it is the other, the relationship is right because it is non-egoistic. Sin is having the focus on oneself rather than the other. The problem of this dialectics is, among other things, that it puts oneself and another in a fundamentally competitive relationship of an either or between oneself and another. Augustine's Trinitarian anthropology avoids this, because the right relationship to God as another 'Other' constitutes the quality of the intercreaturely relationship.

This, then, leads to the second issue that we dealt with in our discussion of book 8: what we called the 'chicken-egg problem'. The problem is the fall. If God is 'Ego sum qui sum', and the capability of encountering God depends on the mind's love of itself being in good shape, what happens if that order is damaged? This leads to a web of questions, both fundamental anthropological questions and soteriological questions. Anthropologically, this leads us from book 8 to book 9, in the sense that the Trinitarian relationships that constitute the human being presuppose something in the constitution of the individual. Once the individual directs itself to something that is not God, it leads to what one might call 'Trinitarian disintegration'. Given that God's presence as love constituted interhuman relationships, these will now be characterized by desire, a desire that denotes a fundamental imbalance between the interests of the one loving and the thing loved. The thing or

person desired will, however, also be perceived in a different way, now no longer as it truly is, respected through the act of love, but desired as an object of power. This, however, also leads to the destruction of the third relationship, the relationship to oneself. Although, of course, one is oneself and thus should be able to know oneself as one is, the loss of the relationship to God as the source of even self-love, means that even one's image of oneself gets damaged through the fall. This leads to what one could call Augustine's deep psychology. If one is no longer certain of who one is, a fundamental anxiety enters the scene.

What this offers for systematic theology and theology more broadly is a very close connection between a fundamental anthropology and a Christian soteriology. In Augustine's account of sin, many dimensions of what we would now call a 'psychology' are incorporated. In Augustine's view of the postlapsarian human being as characterized by anxiety, a desire for control and a loss of insight in oneself, one might see similarities to psychoanalysis. Augustine does not introduce sin simply as wrongdoing or as a broken relationship with God and other human beings, but he attempts to explain sin anthropologically and psychologically. As a consequence, the Christian soteriology that he offers as a 'solution' to sin is also intended to have direct relevance for our functioning in ordinary life. The merit of this strong connection between theology and anthropology is the relevance of theological insights for ordinary life and other sciences, psychology, for example.

The downside, if you will, to this strong link between fundamental anthropology and soteriology is a tendency towards anthropological exclusivism on the part of Christianity. Augustine aims to show that only through faith in Christ, embedded within the community of the Church, can we be saved from the anthropological misery that we have run into. Thus, only Christianity is able to turn us into psychologically and anthropologically healthy persons. Such is, within a contemporary culture that is deeply characterized by religious pluralism, a far reaching claim. It is clear that Augustine's theology has very interesting ramifications for the dialogue between systematic theology and practical theology at this point, and more broadly, theology and psychology.

Preparing for the move towards the next section, in which we will compare the systematic potential of Augustine's anthropology to Pannenberg's, a specific feature of Augustine's anthropology is its link to salvation history. We have dealt with the link between salvation history and Augustine's theology already in the chapters on Trinity and Christology. In these chapters, the 'historical' nature of Augustine's theology pointed to the fact that for Augustine, the way we speak about and believe in God as Trinity, and Christ as the Son of God, is wholly determined by God's concrete and specific revelation in history. In connection with Augustine's anthropology, however, the claim that his anthropology is profoundly historical points to something else.

The claim that Augustine's anthropology stands out because of its historical character deserves further explanation because, in one sense, many contemporary theologians would say that Augustine's anthropology is not historical at all. One might argue that Augustine's anthropology is ahistorical in the sense that human identity and destiny is entirely pregiven determined by the state in which human beings have been created by God. In the next section, we will see that Pannenberg develops an anthropology in which the identity and destiny of human beings is determined by their future rather than their past.

In another sense, however, Augustine's anthropology is strikingly historical. Augustine's anthropology is historical in the sense of being built on a double state of human beings, states that, in spite of their historical sequence, both continue to determine the identity of human beings. Mostly, an anthropology allows for only one description of what human beings are, often opting for one of two extremes: optimism, in which human beings are good and capable of reaching salvation on their own, or pessimism, in which human beings are fundamentally bad and in which God alone seems responsible for their salvation. Augustine does not adhere to either of these two extremes, however, and he bases this double character of his anthropology on a history. This history is constituted by a state of humanity according to its original intention, on the one hand, and a postlapsarian state in which the original intention is not entirely destroyed but still decisively defected, on the other. Soteriologically, this provides the interesting possibility of appealing constantly to those rests that are present in the fallen human being, pushing it towards a return to its original intention, while still being very realistic about the defects that affect human nature in its present state. I will come back to the potential of this historical anthropology for systematic theology in my discussion of Pannenberg.

4.8. From Trinity to Binary: Pannenberg's Anthropology

Wolfhart Pannenberg's anthropology makes for an interesting comparison to Augustine's for a number of reasons.[37] First of all, Pannenberg's anthropology, different from Augustine's, really strives to be a truly 'Trinitarian' anthropology in the sense of the contemporary Trinitarian renaissance, claiming that the whole of theology is to be structured after the doctrine of the

[37] For a concise introduction to Pannenberg's theology, see Christoph Schwöbel, 'Wolfhart Pannenberg', in David Ford, editor, *The Modern Theologians* (2nd edition; Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), 180–208, or later editions. For a book-length introduction, see Christiaan Mostert, *God and the Future: Wolfhart Pannenberg's Eschatological Doctrine of God* (London: T&T Clark, 2002).

Trinity. We have claimed above that Augustine's anthropology is structured in a Trinitarian way, although this 'Trinitarian' structure is explicitly not intended to mirror the way in which God is Trinity. We argued that it was precisely this distinction between the unique way in which God is, and the way human beings are, that renders Augustine's anthropology truly Trinitarian. The interesting question will now be in what way and to what extent Pannenberg's anthropology can be said to be Trinitarian.

Pannenberg's anthropology makes for another interesting point of comparison because it is explicitly intended to build a bridge between a secular understanding of the way in which human beings are and a theological rendering of it. As we have seen above, Augustine develops his anthropology in a constant moving back and forth between showing the indispensability of Christian faith to our anthropological restoration and an appeal to non-believers showing them that the Christian view is relevant from a pagan 'philosophical' perspective. We find a similar strong apologetic interest in Pannenberg, even to the extent of an intention to show the universal truth and significance of Christian faith at a secular anthropological level.

Last but not least, Pannenberg makes for an interesting comparison because his anthropology features an extensive and explicit reception of Augustine's anthropology. As we will see, Pannenberg adopts one of Augustine's ways of conceptualizing sin, namely, as *amor sui*. It will then be interesting to investigate the similarities and differences between Pannenberg and Augustine to see what the systematic implications of these differences are.

4.8.1. Pannenberg's Anthropology

We start from Pannenberg's fundamental anthropology that he develops in his 1983 book *Anthropology in a Theological Perspective*. This means that, for the time being, the Trinitarian and specifically theological context of his anthropology remains out of sight, but is still prepared for in an implicit way. At first, the analysis is based on insights from modern philosophy and psychology. At the heart of Pannenberg's anthropology is what, following H. Plessner, Pannenberg calls the tension between the centrality of the I and the openness towards the world:

> It is perhaps the most important merit of Plessner's description of the human form of life that it provides a way of interpreting the ambiguity of human behavior, namely, in the light of the tension between centrality and exocentricity in the human being.[38]

[38] Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Anthropology in Theological Perspective* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1985), 80; Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Anthropologie in theologischer Perspektive* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1983), 77.

This tension is specific to being human because only the human person has self-consciousness, knowing that it is someone, and, thus, is a being that longs for the creation and maintenance of a personal identity. The tension is not just a consequence of self-consciousness, but a consequence of the fact that a human being is for its self-consciousness always already dependent on being with others, which means that what I am, I am in dependence on other human beings:

> The fact that the first and foremost of the objects that human beings turn to and observe is another human being and that in doing so they are able to put themselves in the place of the other and understand actual and possible reactions to themselves – *this* is the basis for the passage to self-consciousness and to the inspection of one's own being from outside, from the standpoint of another. It follows from this theory of the genesis of self-consciousness that the human being as self-conscious ego is not grounded in itself and independent of others. Rather, self-consciousness and the self-conscious ego are constituted through relation to the other. This is not to say that the ego is a creation of the Thou; the point is, rather, that individuals comprehend themselves by putting themselves in the place of others over against themselves.[39]

In being dependent on others, I am also ultimately dependent on God. The dependence on God follows from my dependence on others, because in the relationship to other beings the dependence on the totality of all beings is always already implied, which brings in Pannenberg's crucial notion of the whole (*das Ganze*) and the infinite (*das Unendliche*). In *Anthropology in Theological Perspective*, Pannenberg formulates this relationship between other beings and the whole as follows:

> There is an original and at least implicit reference of human beings to God that is connected with the structural openness of their life form to the world and that is concretized in the limitlessness of basic trust. . . . All this does not prove the reality of God, but it does prove the constitutive link between humanity and the religious thematic. To the limitlessness of basic trust, which looks beyond the mother to God as its primary object, corresponds its reference to the wholeness of the self. Basic trust in the proper sense is directed to that agency which is able to protect and promote the self in its *wholeness*. For this reason, God and salvation are very closely tied together in the living of basic trust. The salvation looked for from God has to do with the unimpaired wholeness of life, as *Heil*, the German word for 'salvation,'

[39] Pannenberg, *Anthropology*, 187; Pannenberg, *Anthropologie*, 181.

> suggests (*Heil:* 'wholeness,' 'integrity'). In this wholeness, individual life and the life of the community to which the individual belongs are closely intertwined.[40]

The dependence on God as constitutive of human beings has another aspect that introduces a third central concept, namely, the fundamentally eschatological character of being and identity in Pannenberg's theology. What human beings are is not a given from the past, a stable identity, but is determined by the future. Striving for the maintenance and reach of their ultimate identity, human beings long for infinity. This is why Pannenberg defends the existence of life after death reminding one of Augustine's argument that true happiness must be eternal. But of course, given that human beings always live in the here and now and thus are finite beings, the determination of their ultimate identity always lies in the future, a future that they can never realize on their own. The true identity of the human person, therefore, cannot reside in themselves, but must be grounded in that which can only encompass past, present and future, the whole or the infinite:

> Selfhood, however, means identity in all individual life. This is true even over a stretch of time, hence selfhood never achieves definitive manifestation in life. . . . We can attain to the totality of our own lives, notwithstanding its fragmentary form at the moment, only in the relation to our Creator.[41]

An ultimate view of oneself, but also of others, therefore, is only possible from the perspective of the infinite. Theologically speaking, Pannenberg formulates this as the necessity of a relationship with God as the infinite for viewing the world as it truly is. Reminding one of Augustine's anthropology, especially of book 10, one can only see oneself as one truly is if one sees oneself as created and dependent on God, and deals with all finite things from this perspective.

The tension between I-centredness and openness towards the world is not one between two equal poles, and in saying so, we enter into a discussion of Pannenberg's concept of sin:

> The distortion of the relation between the central ego and the exocentric aspect means a failure of human beings in relation to themselves, since in their striving to win themselves they neglect their exocentric

[40] Pannenberg, *Anthropology*, 234; Pannenberg, *Anthropologie*, 227; see also, Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematische Theologie* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1988–1993), II, 331.

[41] Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991–1998), II, 200; Pannenberg, *Systematische Theologie*, II, 230.

> side. The self-positing of the ego finds expression primarily in the effort to gain control somehow of everything, including, above all, the conditions of its own existence.[42]

For Pannenberg, and in this respect he sees himself clearly in line with Augustine, sin is fundamentally an ill-formed love of oneself: *amor sui*.[43] This *amor sui* is a theological designation, but it is explained in *Anthropology in Theological Perspective* as part of the anthropological set-up of human beings and hence not only as a theological, but also as a psychological category. Through *amor sui*, human beings perceive the world in a way that is not in accordance with its true nature, namely, as a finite creation dependent on an infinite creator. Love of oneself leads to *superbia*, the idea that human beings can constitute their own identity, becoming infinite in themselves rather than being constituted by the infinite that God is:

> To the extent that human beings try to gain their wholeness and strive to be 'in and for themselves,' they are always a 'desire to be God.' Thus the striving for self-realization that is directed towards the wholeness of one's own being is in fact to be understood as an expression of sin, of the will 'to be like God.'[44]

Different from Augustine, this brokenness of the human way of being is not caused by a fall, but given in the very phenomenology of the tension between I-centredness and dependence on the other. Pannenberg rejects the idea of a historical fall; it seems mainly because the historicity of the fall can no longer be maintained after the rise of a historical-critical approach to the Bible. In addition, however, the strong connection that Pannenberg draws between an anthropological analysis of human beings and a theological anthropology makes it also hardly possible to account for the contingency of a historical fall because, in Pannenberg's anthropological analysis, sin follows from the very 'essence' of being human, rather than from an accidental way of dealing with that essence: The I perceives everything from its own perspective ignoring its dependence on others. These roots of sin in the fundamental condition of human beings lead to what we might call Pannenberg's doctrine of original sin, which he describes in these lively terms:

[42] Pannenberg, *Anthropology*, 106; Pannenberg, *Anthropologie*, 103. The paragraph of which this is the first sentence is considerably modified in the English translation.

[43] Pannenberg, *Anthropology*, 87–96; Pannenberg, *Anthropologie*, 83–93.

[44] Pannenberg, *Anthropology*, 234; Pannenberg, *Anthropologie*, 227. The paragraph of which this is the first sentence in the German version, is considerably modified in the English translation.

> Despite the ambiguity which attaches in principle to all human behavior, it must be said that in their pregiven existential structure all human beings are determined by the centrality of their ego. They individually experience themselves as the center of their world. Thus they experience space as in front and in back, right and left, with their vantage point at any given moment functioning as the center to which all is related. They experience time as past and future that are divided by the point which is their present, and are thus relative to them. And we experience everything as being, like time and space, relative to our ego as to the center of our world. It is clear, then, what deep roots egocentricity has in our natural organization and in our sensible perception. it is not at all the case that egocentricity first makes its appearance in the area of moral behavior; rather, it already determines the whole way in which we experience the world. If this relatedness of everything to the ego is, in the form of *amor sui*, the essential element in sin or the failure of human beings in regard to themselves, then sin is not simply or first of all something moral but is closely connected with the *natural conditions* of our existence.[45]

Still, Pannenberg denies that this means that our human nature as such is bad, and, in denying this, he refers again to his ontology of the future. The ultimate nature of human beings does not consist in what they are at present, but in what they have been intended for, namely, communion with God:

> But even if human beings are in this sense sinners *by nature*, this does not mean that their nature as human beings is sinful. . . . As a matter of fact, 'according to their nature,' that is, in respect of their destination to humanity, human beings are exocentric beings who by creating cultures are to impose a new form, both within themselves and outside themselves, on the pregiven conditions of their existence and thus transcend these under the guidance of experiences of meaning that are, in the final analysis, religious. It is precisely the natural conditions of their existence, and therefore that which they are by nature, that human beings must overcome and cancel out if they are to live their lives in a way befitting their 'nature' as human beings.
>
> . . . The essential concept of the human person is an 'ought' concept, not, however, one that is applied extrinsically to the actual living of human life but one that is operative in the exocentric structure of this life.[46]

[45] Pannenberg, *Anthropology*, 106–107; Pannenberg, *Anthropologie*, 104.
[46] Pannenberg, *Anthropology*, 107–108; Pannenberg, *Anthropologie*, 105.

Speaking of the destiny (*Bestimmung*) of human beings, we can now make the move towards the soteriological and Trinitarian aspects of Pannenberg's anthropology, aspects that directly connect to what we have seen so far. In terms of the works quoted, we move now from the *Anthropology* to the *Systematic Theology*. Starting from the thesis that human beings are always already themselves in being with others, and that this presupposes also a consciousness of the infinite as the totality of beings, Pannenberg connects these general metaphysical insights with the doctrine of the Trinity, starting from the brokenness of human *Dasein*:

> Nevertheless, in a rational distinction of each finite being from every other, and of all finite things, including ourselves, from the infinite, the divine Logos is at work, who creates and rules all creaturely existence in its individuality. In spite of all the perversion due to sin, of which we must speak later, human intelligence in its perception of the otherness of the other participates in the self-distinction of the eternal Son from the Father by which he is not merely united to the Father but is also the principe of all creaturely existence in its individuality.[47]

The discernment of otherness is a participation in the eternal self-differentiation of the Son from the Father, the emergence of all finitude from the infinity of the Father. We see a similar connection between the dependence on others in the constitution of human beings and the Trinity a bit further on in the *Systematic Theology*, when Pannenberg states: 'The "ecstasy" of consciousness – that it "stands outside" – means enhanced and more inward life and therefore more intense participation in the Spirit, the creative origin of life.'[48] What we see is an original act of differentiation, between the Father as the Infinite and the Son as the finite emerging from this Infinite and a destination, the moment of the Spirit. This destination is the increasing awareness and conscious acceptance of the original differentiation between the infinite and the finite, through which human beings become partakers in the divine self-differentiation as part of the Spirit. This Spirit is at the same time the divine force-field of all differentiation. Thus, on the level of intra-Trinitarian relationships, one can say that the moment of the Father and the Son are fulfilled in the Spirit, or brought to completion by the eschatological power of God as Spirit. Anthropologically, one can say that a human being reaches its destiny in so far as it positively accepts its own finitude through a loving relationship with God as the infinite. This, then, is the anthropological destiny of human beings if it is constituted by God rather than human beings themselves:

[47] Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, II, 196; Pannenberg, *Systematische Theologie*, II, 226.
[48] Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, II, 196; Pannenberg, *Systematische Theologie*, II, 227.

> Being like[49] God is indeed our destiny, yet for this very reason it is a temptation for us (Gen. 3:5). When we snatch it to us as our prey (Phil. 2:6), whether by way of the religious cultus or by emancipation from all religious ties, we miss it. For this reason, we cannot achieve it directly by human action. It can be achieved only when we know that we are distinct from God and, in our finitude over against him, accept ourselves as his creatures. By thus distinguishing God from everything finite, we pay him the honor of his deity.[50]

From this conscious acceptance of one's finitude before God, the function of Jesus as the Son of God becomes clear:

> In the Son the image is achieved in the sense of full likeness, not because God made himself the same or similar, but because the Son distinguished himself from the Father and the Father from himself in order to reveal the Father as the one God. In this way the Son is so in accord with the being of God as Father that only in relation to him is the Father eternally Father and God. Only to the degree that the self-distinction of the Son from the Father takes human form in the human distinction from God do we find a person who corresponds to God, who as the image of God is destined for fellowship with him.[51]

The divinity of Jesus, therefore, is not a divinity of a self-exclaimed God, but rather the opposite: in the resurrection of Jesus by God, God has recognized Jesus' positive acceptance of his finitude and his obedience to the Father as the paradigmatic expression of divine self-differentiation, and, thus, Jesus became recognized and accepted by the Father as the Son by virtue of this acceptance of his finitude. This, then, is also the destiny of human beings through faith in the Son, by which they accept their own finitude and become Godlike:

> Only by accepting our finitude as God-given do we attain to the fellowship with God that is implied in our destiny of divine likeness. In other words, we must be fashioned into the image of the Son, of his *self-distinction* from the Father. We participate thus in the *fellowship* of the Son with the Father.[52]

[49] The official English translation reads 'Being with God' here, but the original German has 'Sein wie Gott' which implies a resemblance that is not necessarily implied in being 'with' God.

[50] Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, II, 230; Pannenberg, *Systematische Theologie*, II, 264.

[51] Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, II, 230–231; Pannenberg, *Systematische Theologie*, II, 265.

[52] Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, II, 230, emphasis added from the German original; Pannenberg, *Systematische Theologie*, II, 265.

4.8.2. Pannenberg versus Augustine

If we compare Pannenberg's anthropology with Augustine's, we see a few remarkable similarities, but also many striking differences. In both theologians, the doctrine of the Trinity is in some way influential if not determinative for the structure of anthropology, but in different ways. This leads to what I will eventually defend as a binitarian anthropology in Pannenberg, versus a Trinitarian anthropology in Augustine. Of course, the fact that I will deconstruct Pannenberg's anthropology as binitarian means that in the end something is at stake in his doctrine of God as well. I will argue that his Trinitarian doctrine of God is fundamentally rooted in a dialectics, which means that its Trinitarian character is ultimately based on a binary relationship rather than a Trinitarian one. At its very basis is a concept of God as the absolute, which means that the dialectics that it features goes back to an original all-encompassing unity that renders the otherness that it suggests into a derivative of the single principle governing the dialectics.

A first attempt to construe this point can be made through a closer look at the structure of a human being. At the root of what human beings are is a binary opposition, namely, that between I-centredness and openness to the world. This opposition is characterized by competition. The I wants to stay independent, but by its very nature it is not. It is important to see that in this binary opposition between I-centredness and openness to others, there is no distinct constituting relationship between the I and God, different from the general relationship between the I and an 'other'. Pannenberg distinguishes between the relationship between the I and other finite beings, and the relationship between the I and the Infinite, but this has no consequence for the overall structure of his anthropology. Both relationships are explained in terms of a single binary relationship between I-centredness and openness to others. The relationship between the I and the Infinite is a given, because it is presupposed in the relationship between the I and other finite beings. This has consequences for Pannenberg's concept of sin as well. Pannenberg construes sin as an exaggerated emphasis on one's I-centredness, tending towards ignoring one's dependence on other finite beings. The attempt towards infinity on the part of sinful human beings *is* this exaggerated I-centredness, rather than a distinct moment in the relationship to God as the Infinite.

This is different in Augustine. In Augustine, the relationship between the I and God is distinct from that between the I and other finite beings. The root of sin is not the attempt to ignore one's dependence on other human beings, but it is rather one's attempt to replace one's unique relationship to God with a relationship to oneself or something in this world. Thus, in Augustine, we find that the I is constituted by three relationships: a relationship to God, one to other finite beings and one to itself. Sin is responsible for the damage to the relationship to God and causes severe forms of distortion in the two others. Thus, as I have argued in the previous section, one can say

that Augustine's Trinitarian structure of human beings is opposite to Pannenberg's binary structure of human beings.

The distinct role of the relationship to God has ramifications for the question of competition between the I and the two 'others'. In Augustine, there is no fundamental competition between the I and God, nor is there between the I and finite others. If the I respects its own nature, namely, as created by God – neither God nor the human being takes the position of all-encompassing Infinite! – there is no competition between the I and God, and if it respects its own role within creation, there is no competition with other human beings either. This highlights the fact that in Augustine, there is an anthropological 'original' state that is not, like Pannenberg's, characterized by violence between one's desire for self-constitution and one's dependence on others. This also explains why there is a proper place for self-love in Augustine and not in Pannenberg. The *amor sui*, that Pannenberg speaks of, is in itself sin, whereas in Augustine an I that loves itself as it truly is, namely, as God's beloved creature, does no sin at all. Quite the contrary, the proper love of oneself is a crucial requirement for the proper love of other human beings, and it is the flip side of the proper love of God, because someone who loves God as one's creator above all loves oneself as created by God. Here again, the Trinitarian structure of human beings does away with the binary and, therefore, competitive relationship that characterizes Pannenberg's anthropology.

This leads to the consideration of the notion of sin in Pannenberg. Pannenberg sees sin as belonging to the deep structure of what human beings are. As we have seen, this is due to the binary character of his anthropology, which makes one either self-constituting, or dependent on others at the cost of one's independence. Rejecting the idea of a historical fall, Pannenberg has no choice but to make sin part of human nature, and he needs an appeal to his idea of the futurity of all being to counter the suggestion that the destiny of human beings is their sin. If Pannenberg's thinking would allow for a historical fall – I think his binary anthropology does not – he would have had the opportunity to do what Augustine does: account for the nature of human beings in terms of an original goodness, an accidental but pervasive defect, and the possibility of its restoration. A comparison between Augustine and Pannenberg shows how much potential Augustine's anthropology has at this point, and how it avoids quite a few of the problems in Pannenberg's anthropology.

One of such problems is, I think, a very drastic one, namely, the question of whether there is any potential for salvation in Pannenberg's anthropology. Pannenberg suggests that human nature is not bad in itself because the true identity of a human person consists in its destiny rather than its origin. God as Spirit, moving all that is to its proper end, brings about the salvation of humankind in Jesus Christ, in which the true destiny of human beings becomes visible, and moves humans to faith in Christ through the Spirit. The

question is, however, whether the *amor sui* as an exaggerated I-centredness is so strongly bound to the social and psychological set-up of humans that a change of this into a balance between I-centredness and openness towards the world is hardly conceivable, precisely in these social and psychological terms. Augustine has other options in that regard. In Augustine, salvation, as the gradual restoration of one's original state, appeals to a state that is already properly human. Salvation does not come to the human soul as an alien addition, rather, salvation comes to it as the liberation of its alien bondage. In Pannenberg, there is no such original goodness, and, therefore, it seems that either a change of the human person to its destined identity is inconceivable or this change turns human beings into a totally new way of being. The last option, however, would imply a serious devaluation of creation, introducing a dualism between creation and salvation.

It is helpful to point to the additional step that Pannenberg's theology introduces here between Augustine, Luther and himself. Luther is an intermediary figure between Augustine and Pannenberg in that Luther's doctrine of sin is more severe than Augustine's. Luther has less room for free will and less or even no room for an appeal to the natural capabilities of the sinner in salvation. Nevertheless, although sin is very severe, it is not as severe as turning salvation into something unnatural because the severity of sin does not do away with the goodness of creation. Given the historical account of the fall that is still present in Luther, God restores something in salvation that was intended to be there in human beings, even if it was lost (almost) completely through original sin.

This is the last step that Pannenberg takes, namely, to turn Luther's stronger version of original sin into a natural human condition, especially due to the strong connection with a phenomenological, social and psychological analysis of human behaviour. Pannenberg's account of sin is so much linked to the very basics of human actions that it is hard to think how one could do without them.

Of course, one might easily object that to argue for Augustine's anthropology at this point is also to argue for the historicity of the fall, which is by no means easy to render plausible. My argument is not intended as such, however. First of all, I think that an anthropology based on the idea of a *posse peccare*, *non posse non peccare*, and so on does not depend on the *historicity* of the fall, that is, our ability to make a case by means of the historical sciences for the fact that Adam and Eve fell say about 6,000 years ago. Events that took place about 6,000 years ago, especially events like these, with no archaeological traces left and whatever evidence one would require, are hard to make a case for anyway.[53] What I want to show is that the idea

[53] Cf. Maarten Wisse, *Scripture between Identity and Creativity: A Hermeneutical Theory Building upon Four Interpretations of Job* (Ars Disputandi Supplement Series 1; Utrecht: Ars Disputandi, 2003), URL: http://adss.library.uu.nl, chapter 9.

of a historical fall is not without interesting and important consequences for theological anthropology, apart from the question of their historicity. Anthropologies including a fall at a certain point in time give the systematic theologian an option for accounting for the ambiguity of human nature, the nature of its defects and the character of its restoration in a way that other anthropologies cannot.

Returning to the discussion of Pannenberg's anthropology, we have seen that one might ask whether a being that is so strongly bound up to I-centredness can plausibly be thought to grow into the acceptance of its dependence on others, especially in its dependence on God as the true Infinite. But there are other areas where the question of whether salvation is possible becomes urgent, especially the concept of God. A key aspect of God in Pannenberg is God's Infinity. It is because of God's infinity that God is the Almighty God who is able to bring about that which we cannot realize. None of us is able to realize his or her own identity because that identity depends on the future, which is not in our hands. It is, however, in the hands of God, and God is God precisely because the future – as well as the past and present – is determined by God as the all-encompassing force-field of the Spirit. The identity of God is determined by the future, but it is guaranteed by the fact that God includes this future, and, therefore, it cannot get out of God's hands.

Christoph Schwöbel has already pointed to the problem that this leaves God indeterminate to some extent as long as the eschaton is not realized.[54] Pannenberg might reply to this that the fact that God, as the Infinite, is master of the future as much as of the past and the present, and in that sense, there is no indeterminacy in God. But this does not solve the problem of God's indeterminacy, because, in fact, the charge of indeterminacy might be made in a different way. The problem is the notion of 'including the future' as such. If God as the Infinite includes the future, the question is in what way God includes it. If God includes the future as it is by definition, namely, future, which means not yet realized, then God includes it, but includes it as indeterminate, not only at a certain moment before God masters it, but forever, because the future is indeterminate by definition, that is, without limit. One might object to this by saying that if God masters the future, God is able to bring it to an end, but this directly contradicts the definition of God as the Infinite, because bringing history to a conclusion means to limit it in some way, which is impossible given that God is the Infinite. Therefore, the problem in Pannenberg seems to be that not even God as the Infinite can realize the eschaton, as the eschaton as a definitive realization of a good or even perfect state of the universe as God intends it is impossible because it is self-contradictory.

In asking whether even God can bring about salvation in Pannenberg's theology, we have already moved to the level of God rather than the level of

[54] Schwöbel, 'Wolfhart Pannenberg', 285–286.

anthropology. Many critical questions could be asked with regard to Pannenberg's doctrine of God. Others have done this from many different perspectives. I will concentrate on what I have called the binary character of Pannenberg's theology. Especially in the doctrine of God, Pannenberg goes along with the new interest in Trinitarian theology that arose in the second half of the twentieth century. Hence, what one would expect is a theology that is specifically Trinitarian in character. From my analysis of Pannenberg's anthropology, I have already shown that this anthropology is in fact not Trinitarian, but rather binary in character.

The question now is whether the binary character that we found in Pannenberg's anthropology returns in his doctrine of God. I think it does. We have already seen that Pannenberg makes a strong connection between the bidirectional structure of human beings, and the nature of God. Let me repeat the crucial quote from the *Systematic Theology*, volume II:

> In spite of all the perversion due to sin, of which we must speak later, human intelligence in its perception of the otherness of the other participates in the self-distinction of the eternal Son from the Father by which he is not merely united to the Father but is also the principle of all creaturely existence in its individuality.[55]

A bit further, a similar parallel occurs between the destiny of human beings and the role of the Holy Spirit: 'The "ecstasy"; of consciousness – that it "stands outside" – means enhanced and more inward life and therefore more intense participation in the Spirit, the creative origin of life.'[56]

What we see here, is that underlying the Trinitarian language of theology is a philosophical concept of self-differentiation that is in fact binary rather than Trinitarian. The self-differentiation between Father and Son is the basic relationship and dichotomy that governs the whole, whereas the Spirit is not an independent relationship co-constituting the relationships between Father and Son, Son and Spirit, and Father and Spirit, but is only the field of realization of the dichotomy between Father and Son. The Spirit reconciles the 'violence' between Father and Son, and is the elevation of the tension that came about in the self-differentiation of the Infinite into the finite.

From this, it becomes clear that the theological language that is used to describe the nature of God as Father, Son and Spirit is in fact not constitutive for the discourse. The relationship between the two poles in tension could equally be described in terms of a general concept of relationality than in terms of Trinitarian language. This is also what Pannenberg in fact does when he describes the tension in anthropological terms. The only thing that Christianity seems to add, and that we did not yet know from the anthropological

[55] Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, II, 196; Pannenberg, *Systematische Theologie*, II, 226.
[56] Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, II, 196; Pannenberg, *Systematische Theologie*, II, 227.

analysis, is that the I-centredness and openness to the world are in fact intended to live peacefully together. This is what Jesus proleptically shows, according to Pannenberg, and what God as the Spirit realizes from the future to the present. It is to be questioned, however, whether we did not yet know that this was intended, because the inner tension in the human person eventually springs from the unity of everything in the Infinite, so that even our destiny is in the end the product of a philosophical fact, as much as our positive acceptance of our dependence on others for our own identity is the affirmation of our ontological state of being.

In the end, it seems to me, the reason for the binary character of Pannenberg's theology is to be sought in the dialectical character of his theology. The notion of the whole as the all-encompassing concept leads to the self-differentiation of this Absolute in that which is infinite and what is not. The concept of the whole is the condition of possibility for the appearance of the Absolute in thought and the root of the binary character of everything we say about God, human beings and the world. The self-differentiation of the Absolute is then united again in an all-encompassing reconciliation as the moment of the Spirit. Although every attempt is made to account for real otherness within the infinite self-differentiation of God, in the end there is none. Two boils down to one and zero, and one and zero boil down to one. Real otherness is excluded.

This is different in Augustine. The remarkable feature of Augustine's Trinitarian anthropology is that it is grounded in a Trinitarian understanding of God, but this Trinitarian understanding of God is different from the Trinitarian structure of the human person. The Trinitarian understanding of God is inconceivable and unique, so that no copy and paste is possible between God and the structure of human beings. Exactly this unique character of God is then the foundation of the Trinitarian character of the human person because this unique character of God constitutes a unique relationship between God and human beings that is not mediated by an innerworldly relationship. Because this relationship cannot be reduced to a relationship to oneself or to someone else, all three relationships retain their proper character and co-constitute the nature of the human person.

Once sin has entered the world through the transgression of God's commandment, all three relationships get involved, but none of them lose their distinct character. This can be seen in their restoration. Beginning to love oneself as one properly is, is a step on the way towards the reintegration of the human person, and, thus, also to the love of God and the love of other beings. In the restoration of a proper love of oneself, however, one is dependent on at least the proper love of God because one cannot love oneself as oneself without seeing oneself as being created by God. The restoration of the proper love of others is likewise dependent on the proper love of God and of oneself. Even the true love of God is distinct from, but impossible without the proper love of others and of oneself.

5

EPISTEMOLOGY

5.1. Introduction

In the epistemology of the Western tradition, the adage 'to know something is to be identical with it' has often played a prominent role, even if it is sometimes not explicitly acknowledged. The idea is present in a classical Platonic metaphysics, in which it is taken literally, as true knowledge consists in returning from one's own particular embodiment to a higher level of unity, ultimately becoming one with everything. The idea of truth as identity is also present in what is called the standard view of a medieval theory of truth: *adequatio rei et intellectus*. If there is a match between the representation of an object in the mind, we speak of truth. Also, in a modern correspondence theory of truth, a statement is true if the state of affairs described in it, is identical to the state of affairs in reality.

Augustine's view of knowledge and truth is an interesting case in point vis-à-vis the adage 'to know something is to be identical with it'.[1] On the one hand, Augustine's theory of knowledge and truth is often seen as residing very close to Platonism, especially because of his theory of illumination, an idea that is quite similar to the Platonic theory of the eternal ideas. On the other hand, Augustine's theory of knowledge and truth is often seen as a precursor of Descartes's epistemological revolution because Augustine defends the certainty of self-knowledge in a way that sounds similar to Descartes, and, as we will see, his theory of knowledge suggests some sort of correspondence theory of truth that seems close to those found throughout modernity.

In theological circles, neo-Augustinian theologians, such as those associating themselves with Radical Orthodoxy, emphasize Augustine's Platonist affiliations over against his proto-Cartesian aspects. Augustine's Christian Platonism, they suggest, implies a strongly participationist account of truth.

[1] In 11.16, Augustine demonstrates himself to be well aware of the Platonic principle of knowledge: 'But all positive knowledge of quality is like the thing which it knows.' Augustine, however, as I intend to show, does not interpret the principle in an ontological way, as Platonism does.

Everything that is, and thus the access that the knower has to the truth, precisely *is* insofar as it is in God, so that those who are *in* God know the truth. On the basis of this Christian Platonism, as they determine it to be, they criticize theories of knowledge and truth that view the world as an object that is at a distance from the epistemological access of the knower. In the end, they argue, the knower and the thing known are inseparably linked in their union in God.

The purpose of this chapter is to throw some fresh light on Augustine's theory of truth and knowledge through an in-depth reading of book 11 of *De Trinitate*, the book in which Augustine discusses what he sees as a 'trinity in outer man', that is a trinity in sense perception of external creaturely objects. On the basis of the analysis of this book 11 in section 5.3, I will argue that the main innovative element of Augustine's theory of truth and knowledge is that it breaks with the old adage of 'to know is to be identical with the object of knowledge'. In section 5.4, I will show this in terms of a comparison between Augustine's and Plotinus' theories of sense perception. Subsequently, in section 5.5, I will contrast Augustine's theory of sense perception, knowledge and truth with the recent defence of a participationist theory of knowledge in Radical Orthodoxy. In section 5.6, I will draw upon the systematic implications of Augustine's theory in terms of a discussion of the consequences of his view for the relationship between the transcendentals. I will argue that Augustine's doctrine of creation, which is the basis for his rejection of the philosophical adage, leads to a stronger distinction between the transcendentals than is generally held in the literature. Finally, in section 5.7, I will draw some conclusions about the consequences of Augustine's view for the nature of theological truth.

5.2. Book 11 in the Context of the Second Half of De Trinitate

In the previous chapter, I have developed a heuristic tool for the interpretation of the second half of *De Trinitate*. This heuristic tool provides also the basic framework for assessing the argument in book 11. I have distinguished between four intertwined levels of argument in the second half. Let me recall them briefly, and then see how book 11 fits into this interpretative framework. The first layer of argumentation is the original anthropological constitution of human beings as oriented towards loving God above all and one's neighbour as oneself. The second aims at elucidating the consequences of the fall and sin in terms of the disintegration of the image of God in human beings. The third level concerns the possibility of the restoration of the original state of human beings through faith in Christ. The final level of argumentation is that of the search for an 'image' of the Trinity in the created order.

Now, given that we have this outline of what Augustine is doing in the second part of the *De Trinitate*, we are in a position to zoom in a bit more on the immediate context of book 11 in order to investigate what Augustine calls the 'trinity in outer man'. Book 11 continues the line of argument from book 10, and, in terms of the different layers in Augustine's argument, these books are particularly concerned with the first two levels outlined above. In these books, Augustine argues for a fundamental anthropological view of human beings, namely, one in which they submit themselves to God and love God above all, and on the basis of which they are then able to live blessedly. We see this clearly at the centre of book 10, where Augustine asks:

> Why therefore is it enjoined upon it, that it should know itself? I suppose, in order that, it may consider itself, and live according to its own nature; that is, seek to be regulated according to its own nature, viz., under Him to whom it ought to be subject, and above those things to which it is to be preferred; under Him by whom it ought to be ruled, above those things which it ought to rule. (10.7)

If the mind loves God above all and rules everything according to this rule, it knows and loves itself perfectly, and as book 14 finally affirms, it will display an image of the Trinity.

At the same time, Augustine emphasizes all sorts of defects in the mind's knowing and loving of itself, due to sin, as one sees in this quote immediately following the previous one:

> For it [the mind] does many things through vicious desire, as though in forgetfulness of itself. For it sees some things intrinsically excellent, in that more excellent nature which is God: and whereas it ought to remain steadfast that it may enjoy them, it is turned away from Him, by wishing to appropriate those things to itself, and not to be like to Him by His gift, but to be what He is by its own, and it begins to move and slip gradually down into less and less, which it thinks to be more and more; for it is neither sufficient for itself, nor is anything at all sufficient for it, if it withdraw from Him who is alone sufficient: and so through want and distress it becomes too intent upon its own actions and upon the unquiet delights which it obtains through them: and thus, by the desire of acquiring knowledge from those things that are without, the nature of which it knows and loves, and which it feels can be lost unless held fast with anxious care, it loses its security, and thinks of itself so much the less, in proportion as it feels the more secure that it cannot lose itself. (10.7)

In book 10, Augustine tries to make this point in terms of the inner workings of the mind, especially in terms of the knowledge of oneself. Again different layers of argumentation motivate him to more or less repeat this

argument in book 11, and make the same point on the level of sense perception, that is, on the level of the workings of the mind towards external material objects. One layer that motivates him is complexity, which is also the layer that he makes explicit. On another level, however, the argument in book 11 is also a further explanation of book 10 because, as we have seen in the last quote given above, the problem in the mind had everything to do with the turn from the vision of God, and the love of God above all, to the inappropriate love of creaturely things. Therefore, the argument in book 10 more or less calls for the argument in book 11 because it raises a series of questions: what is sense perception? How does it function if it works properly? And, if sin enters the scene there, what happens?

Finally, before we address the argument in book 11 directly, we need to look forward rather than merely backward. In terms of his own explanation of the purpose of book 11, Augustine merely suggests that an illustration of the trinity of memory, understanding and will in perception will be more easy because they are related to the material world. In terms of the overall argument, however, book 11 acts as a bridge between books 9–10, which focus on the first two levels of the argumentative framework, and books 12–13, which focus on the third level. In order to return to God, Augustine argues in the soteriological parts of *De Trinitate*, human beings need faith in external things, more precisely, faith in Christ. Through the explanation of the trinity in outer man, Augustine prepares his readers for the 'bypass' via external perception and faith that will be required – very much counter to the expectations of his semi-pagan readers – to reach the ultimate vision of God.

5.3. The Argument in Book 11

We are now perhaps more properly equipped for an analysis of book 11 itself. In outlining the argument of this book, I will already hint at the differences between Augustine and the Platonic tradition in order to make for a smoother transition between this and the next section, in which Augustine and the Platonic tradition – limiting myself to Plotinus[2] – will be compared in a more systematic fashion.

[2] I am well aware of the fact that some, especially what one might call the 'Beierwaltes'-school (see, for example, Wayne John Hankey, 'Stephen Menn's Cartesian Augustine: Metaphysical and Ahistorically Modern', *Animus* 3 (1998), URL: www.swgc.mun.ca/animus – visited on 30 September 2004), hold the opinion that Augustine should be especially read as a representative of Porphyrius' Platonism. Whatever might be true of this, the problem with this thesis is that it can hardly be verified or falsified, given that we do not have enough (complete) texts from Porphyrius to have a profound insight into his thought. The reason why research into the Neoplatonic background of Augustine still largely depends on Plotinus is that it is the only large-scale corpus from one of the alleged Neoplatonists that we have.

Book 11 of *De Trinitate* begins as follows:

> No one will doubt that just as the inner man is endowed with understanding, so is the outer man with sensation. Let us try then if we can to pick out some trace of trinity in the outer man too. Not that he is also the image of God in the same way as the inner man; the apostle's verdict is quite clear which declares that it is the inner man *who is being renewed for the recognition of God according to the image of him who created him* (Col 3:10); since elsewhere he says, *Even if our outer man is decaying, the inner man is being renewed from day to day* (2 Cor 4:16). As best we can then let us look for some model of the trinity in this man who is decaying; even if it is not a more accurate model, it may perhaps be easier to distinguish. (11.1)

At the end of the quotation, we see the intention to explain things argued for in book 10 in a more easily comprehensible manner. In the rest of the quotation, we see hardly anything about anthropology or sin. All Augustine has to say here is concerned with the 'surface'-argument, the quest for an image of God in human beings. This will change soon, however. The surface is intended to keep his readership going, motivating them to indeed find that image that Augustine wants them to develop, namely, the love of God above all and the love of one's neighbour as oneself.

That the trinity in outer man is of a rather ambiguous significance becomes clear immediately. In the first sentences of book 11, Augustine stresses the two sides of the coin from the very outset: on the one hand, the trinity he is addressing in this book is not a real image of God, as it is one that is related to materiality, and because it is very important to Augustine never to conceive of God in a material fashion,[3] he needs to qualify the scope of his argument from the very outset. On the other hand, however, the rigidity of the philosophical stress on the nature of God as the opposite of matter – as one finds it in Plotinus – is moderated by the explicit witness of Scripture: not only the mind of man shows traces of God, but also the body.[4]

This stress on the dissimilarity between the image of God in the mind and the traces of God in perception is a recurrent issue in book 11 and later books. Not only in a negative way, however, as this dissimilarity is the main reason for developing the analogy between God as Trinity and the act of perception at the same time. It will turn out that in the restoration of the

[3] See, for example, *conf.* 7, and *trin.* 1.1.

[4] The ambiguity of the trinity in outer man also becomes clear from the relatively little attention that Augustine pays to it. In fact, the discussion of the analogy in the outer man proper takes place only from book 11.1 to 11.5. From 11.6 and onwards, the analogy in the outer man is used to elucidate further the image of the Trinity in the inner man, namely the trinity of memory, intellect and will.

original image of God, the restoration of one's dealing with external things will play a crucial role. It is, namely, through the faith in external, creaturely and visible things – the person of Jesus Christ – that the mind will regain its original health, and, thus, become a full image of God again, although we have to wait until the eschaton to achieve this original blessed state.

Now, let us go on, discussing the trinity in outer man itself. Augustine describes it as follows:

> When we see some particular body, there are three things which we can very easily remark and distinguish from each other. First of all there is the thing we see, a stone or a flame or anything else the eyes can see, which of course could exist even before it was seen. Next there is the actual sight or vision, which did not exist before we sensed that object presented to the sense. Thirdly there is what holds the sense of the eyes on the thing being seen as long as it is being seen, namely, the conscious intention. These three are not only manifestly distinct, but also of different natures. (11.2)

At first, the idea seems relatively simple. The trinity in outer man consists of the external object seen, the impression of the object on the sense organ, and the attention of the mind to the impression of the object on the sense organ. There is a direct parallel of this tripartite account of perception in Plotinus (*Enneads* 4.4.23). There is also a difference, though, as Plotinus extensively argues against the idea of an 'image' imprinted on the soul in perception. Plotinus argues that when we perceive an object, there can be no image on the soul because there is no physical contact between the knowing subject and the object (*Enneads* 4.5–6). Augustine works with the idea of an image imprinted on the mind, even using Plotinus' example of a ring set in wax positively, when Plotinus rejects the analogy (*Enneads* 4.6.1).[5] The three aspects of perception, Augustine calls 'sight' (*visio*, vision, in the old PNF translation). The attention to the mind he calls the will, and it turns out that the will that binds together the object and the impression of the object on the sense organ, is of primary importance. The will, over against the two others, is only a property of the mind. In the emphasis on the will, Augustine differs from Plotinus. Although there is some account of free will in Plotinus, Plotinus never thematizes the role of the will in perception.

After having introduced the trinity in the outer man, Augustine quickly moves to the discussion of the inner man, and now we begin to perceive the deeper purpose of pursuing the alleged 'image' of God in sense perception.

[5] Probably, Plotinus' insistence on rejecting the idea of an imprint on the soul has to do with his rejection of the possibility that the soul might be affected by material objects. In Augustine, the idea of images in the soul plays an important role in his overall argument, as, for example, in the loss of self-knowledge in book 10.

Augustine is going to sketch a dual picture of sense perception: one in which the relationship between the various components of perception is balanced and proper, and one in which it is distorted by an improper directedness of the will. Here is the interesting quote marking the beginning of the transition from the analogy of the outer man to the inner man:

> While then the substances of these three differ so widely, they nonetheless come together in so close a unity that the first two can scarcely be held apart even when reason intervenes as judge – that is, the form of the body which is seen and the image of it which is produced in the sense, namely sight. *And the will exerts such force in coupling the two together that it applies the sense to be formed to the thing that is being looked at and holds it there once it is formed. And if it is violent enough to be called love or covetousness or lust, it will even deeply affect the rest of the living being's body.* (11.3)

This idea of the violence of the will in directing the process of perception is then taken up in 11.6, when Augustine proceeds with the trinity in the inner man to that between memory, intellect and will, as it turns out that there too, the will plays a decisive role. Here is how this trinity of the inner man is introduced:

> But the rational soul lives a misshapen kind of life when it lives according to the trinity of the outer man; that is, when instead of bringing a praiseworthy will to bear on the things that form the senses from outside and referring them to some useful end, it fastens on them with sordid greed. For even when the form of the body is taken away which was perceived by the bodily senses, there remains a likeness of it in the memory, to which the will can again turn the attention to be formed by it from within, just as the sense was formed from without by the sensible body presented to it. And so one gets another trinity, out of the memory and internal sight and the will which couples them together; and when these three are *coagitated* into a unity the result is called cogitation or thought, from the very act of *coagitation*. (11.6)

Let us prepare for things to come again, through a preliminary comparison between Augustine and Plotinus. We see Augustine and Plotinus differ at two levels: First, over against Augustine, who construes thought here as linking up the inner man with the outer, Plotinus denies that there is thought in the soul in the sense of thought about external things. In Plotinus, thought is limited to the eternal knowledge of the intelligibles. Second, Plotinus is always eager to deny the responsibility of the soul for evil (*Enneads* 1.1.9–11). Evil is solely caused by the embedding of the soul in matter, but the soul itself cannot do anything about that. Augustine, however, places

evil *in* the soul, namely, in the will. It is not the being bound by matter that makes up sin, but the wrong way of dealing with matter, that is, treating matter as if it were God.

This process of the will bringing elements from memory to the attention of the mind, which is thought (*cogitatio*), is now put to the service of elucidating the ambiguity of human nature. As Augustine proceeds to show in 11.7, the initial danger is in the fact that the power of the will is such that it is almost impossible for reason to distinguish between the image from memory and external objects. Augustine describes a number of psychological examples to illustrate this, such as dreams and psychological disorders (what we would call a hallucination), where people think that they see things that are not present in reality.

This, however, shows a possibility that is central to Augustine's interest in the trinity in the inner man, namely, the possibility of creativity or fantasy (*phantasia*). Such as the will was able to exert power over the body in order to direct it to the perception of a particular object, so the will is able to use elements from memory to construct an image of things one has never seen:[6]

> However, the consciousness has the power of fabricating not merely things that have been forgotten but even things that have never been sensed or experienced; it can compose them out of things that have not dropped out of the memory, by increasing, diminishing, altering, and putting them together as it pleases.

Then, almost immediately, the ambiguity is pointed out. First of all, in its positive side:[7]

> Thus it often pictures something as if it were like what it knows it is not like, or at least what it does not know that it is like. Here one has to be careful neither to lie and so deceive others nor to make an assumption and so deceive oneself. But if you avoid these two evils, there is no harm in such imaginative fancies, just as there is no harm in experiencing sensible things and retaining them in the memory, provided you do not desire them covetously if they are nice nor shirk them shamefully if they are nasty.

And then in its dangerous side:

> But when the will forsakes better things and avidly wallows in these it becomes unclean, and in this way such things can be thought about

[6] See also the example of the sun in 11.13.

[7] In 11.17, Augustine deals explicitly with the question of how error in the mind comes about.

> disastrously when they are present and even more disastrously when they are absent. (11.8, all three subsequent quotes)

The possibility of creativity is crucial to Augustine's anthropology in various ways. How positively Augustine values creativity and fantasy becomes clear at the beginning of book 12, where he argues that, in fact, it is the possibility of creativity in the human mind that distinguishes it from the mind of animals. Animals basically share the same trinity in outer man – insofar as it is not influenced by creativity in human beings. To see objects, store the images of them in their memory, and bring those objects back to the mind, animals practise as well. What animals lack is the awareness of this process – self-consciousness – and the deliberate training of the memory as an act of the will – the antique ideal of teachability! – and finally, the ability to deal with memory in a creative way (12.2).

In addition, the creativity of the mind to combine elements from memory to new constructs and relate these to sense perception is the basis for various aspects of the overall argument in the second part of *De Trinitate*. Sense perception as a combining of elements from memory and the vision of an external object, bound together by an act of the will, explains how it is possible that indeed the will can have such a major role in the act of perception. Thus, Augustine's trinitarian view of sense perception renders an old textbook-question about the voluntarist and the intellectualist anthropologies of the Middle Ages comprehensible. If there is only an intellect and a will in an anthropology, as the textbook presentations have it for the medieval discussion between, for example, Aquinas and Scotus, then it is hardly comprehensible why a voluntarist view could make sense. If the intellect presents something to the will, it would be absurd for the will to make a choice not presented as preferable by the intellect.

In Augustine, however, an act of understanding is not merely an act of perception that is entering the intellect, but an act of the mind in which all three faculties of the mind are always involved. The memory is enabling the act of understanding by linking sense perception with the knower's previous experiences in life. The sense perception brings to this memory new input, and the will mediates between these two in its own independent way. Thus, it is also clear that for Augustine, knowledge can never be 'objective' in the typically modern sense, as the role of the subject and its history is co-constitutive for every act of knowledge.

The ambiguous role of creativity and fantasy is, however, also constitutive for Augustine's view of the consequences of sin. It is because the will can manipulate the data from memory that the loss of self-knowledge is possible, and as Augustine has outlined in book 10. Because the mind no longer sees external things and itself the way they are, it begins to anxiously collect all sorts of images of others and itself, and holds these in place of the things themselves.

Finally, the creativity of the mind is crucial to Augustine's soteriology. In fact, one could see the whole of the second half of *De Trinitate* as an exercise in soteriological creativity. Through sin, the knowledge of God as God is lost to a considerable extent, although the capacity for it has at least been retained. The way in which Augustine develops the idea of traces and an image of the Trinity in the creaturely world is intended to awaken the mind to its original vision of God reactivating the image of God in memory through the use of one's creativity. In addition, the creativity of the mind is also required in the context of Christology, as, for example, the *imitatio Christi* requires one's creativity to envision the historical life of Christ with the aid of elements from one's own experience (cf., for example, 8.7–9, 13.2–3).

Thus, in terms of soteriology, the idea of searching for an image of God in the creaturely world still has an important function, and is not merely a rhetorical device. In book 11, the will connects the external object with the inner vision, or, in the trinity in the inner man, the will connects the image from memory with the vision of the intellect. Throughout book 11, Augustine is intent on showing that the will is neither parent nor offspring, as it does not cause the external object to exist, nor is it the simple product of the external object. Similarly, the will does not cause the image in memory to exist, nor is it the product of the memory. From the perspective of an interest in understanding the structure of the human mind, this point is paid rather much attention to, but the purpose of this becomes clear once we realize that the will in the human mind is Augustine's parallel to the Holy Spirit, which binds the Father and Son together. Thus, through and behind the reflections on the human mind, the attempt to 'exercise' the mind to think of that being that cannot be thought, is constantly hinted at in the background.

Concerning the question of creativity again, we see Augustine and Plotinus differ at two levels: First, it will not surprise the reader to see that in Plotinus, where there is little place for the will and where all the emphasis in knowledge is on the unification with the eternal ideas, there is little attention for the role of creativity in the soul. Ultimately, creativity is the result of a departure from simplicity which, as such, is given with the unfolding of the One in matter, but which, therefore, cannot be positively evaluated. Second, we see a difference with regard to the notion of *memoria*. There is some notion of *memoria* in Plotinus, but it is completely bound up with the relationship between the soul and matter. I remember particular things in so far as the One has fallen apart in me as an individual. Therefore, the further I proceed in unification with the One, the lesser one will remember. At the same time, the higher I will ascend to the One, the *more* I will remember, as I will coincide with everything and therefore, participate in the knowledge of everything eternally.

Returning to Augustine's line of argument in book 11.8, the analysis of the role of the will is immediately put to the purpose of the main thrust of the second half of *De Trinitate*, the attempt to explain the relationship between

the human mind, God, fellow humans, and itself and the effect of sin upon these relationships. Augustine explains this clearly in 11.8:

> This is how one lives a bad and misshapen life according to the trinity of the outer man; for even this second trinity which is busy imagining things inside is still imagining things of the outer world, and is generated for the sake of using sensible and bodily things. For no one could even use them well unless he kept the images of things he had sensed in the memory. And if the greater part of our will is not dwelling amid higher and more inward things, and if that part of it which is applied to bodies outside or to their images inside does not refer whatever it fixes on in them to the better and truer life, and does not rest in that end with his has its eye on when it judges that these outward actions are to be performed, what else are we doing but what the apostle forbids us to do when he says, *Do not be conformed to this age* (Rom 12:2)? (11.8)

This final quote allows us to be as precise as possible about what the 'trinity in outer man' is, such as it is a recurring issue in *De Trinitate*. First, there is the 'outer man' as it appears in the beginning of book 11. This is the human being's mind insofar as it is related to the perception of an external material object. Second, there is the 'inner man' insofar as it is concerned with the understanding of external objects. This is a human being insofar as it thinks about things in reality without actually seeing these things in reality. This sort of inner man will play a crucial role in book 13 because it is the basis of faith in Jesus Christ, a person who has existed in reality but that we now hear about through the proclamation of the Gospel. Then, finally, there is a third type of 'man': the inner man insofar as a human being is directly related to eternal immaterial things, most importantly, to God. This inner man is the true locus of the *imago Dei*, and is the central topic of book 14, and retrospectively, also of books 9 and 10.

5.4. Augustine and the Platonic Tradition

After this rather close reading of the main threads of thought as Augustine develops them in *De Trinitate* book 11, let us take a first step towards the systematic significance of it by contrasting Augustine's view of the trinity in outer man with a Platonic account of perception and truth. In the previous section, we already indicated some of the similarities and differences between Augustine and Plotinus. This section serves to contrast Augustine and the Platonic tradition in a more systematic manner including a discussion of the recent defence of an allegedly Platonic theory of knowledge within Radical Orthodoxy.

Although at first sight, it might seem a Platonic move to seek after an image of God in the creaturely sphere, in fact what Augustine develops here is hardly possible within a Platonism that is not Christianized beforehand. For Plotinus, the idea that the One can be made into an image is deeply problematic, as the One is deemed absolutely simple, and as such, beyond representation. Furthermore, in Plotinus, the One is *not* reached by finding images in the world, but by *abstracting* from the world towards absolute simplicity.

The most important thing to know when one asks for the Platonic view of perception, knowledge and truth is to realize that it is a philosophy of the One, that is, a philosophy in which everything that is, is explained on the basis of a single principle.[8] As such, it is a mathematical philosophy in which, similar to Hegel in modern philosophy, mathematics coincides with ontology. Hence the existence of multiplicity as such is not explained as some sort of thing outside the One, but can only be explained in terms of the unfolding of the One in the many:

> How then does multiplicity come from one? Because it is everywhere, for there is nowhere where it is not. Therefore it fills all things; so it is many, or rather it is already all. Now if it itself were only everywhere, it would itself be all things; but since it is also nowhere, all things come into being through him, because he is everywhere, but are other than him, because he is nowhere. Why then, is he not only everywhere, and is also, besides being everywhere, nowhere? Because there must be one before all things. Therefore he must fill all things and make all things, not be all the things he makes.[9]

This quote is illuminating in that it explains how simplicity precedes multiplicity and encompasses it. Furthermore, it shows how the One is transcendent and immanent at the same time. However, strictly speaking, it does not answer the question it asks, namely, whence multiplicity appears? This is explained in terms of an entirely negative principle which ultimately flows from the One as well, namely, matter. This is important to understand the problems of Plotinus' theory of perception. What matter is as such, we cannot say. It would be pure evil, but as evil does not exist – defining evil would lead Plotinus to dualism – we can only say that matter is the lack of unity, the bringing into appearance of the One into the many. Finally, this quote sheds some light on the 'knowability' of the One. Various strands of research into the history of Platonism stress the importance of the transcendence of the One, which everything refers to but which itself cannot be known.[10] This stress is justified, as

[8] Halfwassen, *Plotin und der Neuplatonismus*, 11–12, referring to Beierwaltes, *Denken des Einen*.

[9] Plotinus, *Enneads* 3.9.4.

[10] This is an important issue in Radical Orthodoxy, see, for example, Catherine Pickstock, *After Writing: On the Liturgical Consummation of Philosophy* (Challenges in Contemporary

the quotation demonstrates. As all knowledge presupposes a certain multiplicity, the One as the One cannot be known. It is important, however, to notice that this transcendence of the One only exists on the epistemological level and as such, only confirms the participation of everything in the One on the ontological level.

Given this ontology of the One, knowledge and truth can be nothing but the going upwards along the chain of being towards greater unity and less multiplicity. Essentially, this means that having knowledge of something is to become one with it, that is, to participate in its being. Knowing something external to the knowing subject is nothing but following the way up from multiplicity to greater unity and then to participate in that higher unity, or be one with the known object. Not surprisingly, the singularity of the known object is of no particular significance. Put bluntly, we don't know the object before us, but we know the eternal ideas that appear in them. As such, one might well say that in Platonism, at least in its Plotinic appearance, epistemology as a theory of how a subject can reliably know an external object does not exist, at least not in opposition to ontology. Epistemology and ontology coincide.

Of course, Plotinus does not neglect the actual perception of external objects altogether. He cannot, however, deal with the perception of external objects on the level of the participation of the soul in the eternal ideas, as, at this level, the soul is entirely unaffected by its relation to matter. Hence, when speaking of the highest level of the soul, Plotinus can explicitly deny perception and even discursive thought in the soul:

> [The soul] will have no sensations and reasoning and opinion will have no connection with it; for sensation is the reception of a form or of an affection of a body, and reasoning and opinion are based on sensation.[11]

The specific problem of perception in Plotinus consists in the attempt to think of the soul as participating in the eternal ideas on the one hand, and being related to matter and, as such, involved in perception and discursive thought on the other – notice though the ambiguity in dealing with the question of whether the soul is affected by external influence or not:[12]

> For [the soul] is the rational principle of all things, and the nature of the soul is the last and lowest rational principle of the intelligibles and the beings in the intelligible world, but first of those in the whole world

Theology; Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), 11–20, but it is by no means exclusively 'radically orthodox'. One finds it also in Halfwassen, *Plotin und der Neuplatonismus*, 38–58.

[11] Plotinus, *Enneads* 1.1.2.

[12] That I am not alone in seeing this as a problem internal to Plotinus' view, can be seen in Porphyry's *On the Life of Plotinus*, where Porphyry tells how he once took three days to push Plotinus on the question of the relation between the soul and the body (*On the Life of Plotinus*, 13).

> perceived by the senses. Therefore it is certainly in relation with both; by the power of the one it flourishes and gains new life, by the power of the others it is deceived because of their likeness and comes down as if charmed. But, being in the middle, it perceives both, and is said to think the intelligibles when it arrives at memory of them, if it comes to be near them; for it knows them by being them in a way; for it knows, not because they settle in it, but because it has them in some way and sees them and is them in a rather dim way, and becomes them more clearly out of the dimness by a kind of awakening, and passes from potentiality to actuality. In the same way [the soul] makes the objects of sense which are, so to speak, connected with it, shine out, one might say, by its own power, and brings them before its eyes, since its power [of sense perception] is ready for them and, in a way, in travail towards them.[13]

Going back to Augustine, we see that Augustine's ability to think of the mind as having a will that is independent from rationality, and even directs the rationality of the soul, as having memory as the result of the course of the subject through the history of its experiences, as having a real exchange of sense data with the body, in short, a dynamic rather than a static subject, are all the result of replacing the Platonic thinking of the One by a Christian understanding of God and creation. Thereby, the soul is desacralized into a creaturely phenomenon – something very important to Augustine because for him, the Platonic idea of the soul as god was an expression of sin as pride par excellence – and matter is sacralized into being a creation by God, thereby showing traces of God.

Consequently, however, the ontological route towards the other in creation by a climbing of the ontological ladder towards unity with everything in the One was given up. The ontological 'gap' that a Christian understanding of creation causes precludes the possibility of thinking the whole of reality as a unity, since at the root of it was no longer a metaphysics of unity, but a free act of the Creator creating everything after its own nature. Hence, what we saw in the argument in book 11 was a subject which was not, in order to arrive at true knowledge, referred to the eternal ideas, but was referred to the reliable relationship between the particular object perceived and the image of it in the mind. Hence, truth does not consist in being identical with the object, or participating in a level of being that encompasses the subject and object in a unifying structure, but a relationship between subject and object presupposing a persistent and positively evaluated distance between subject and object. This distance is even a requirement of true knowledge as it is precisely the ability of the subject to distinguish between the object perceived and the image it makes of it.

[13] Plotinus, *Enneads* 4.6.3.

Hence indeed, where Platonism favoured a participatory concept of truth and knowledge, Augustine moves towards what we could call a 'correspondence theory of truth' in the sense that the question of true knowledge is not one of participating in a common reality, but a reliable representation of the external reality in the thinking subject.

Still, Augustine is not a proponent of a 'modern' correspondence theory of truth either, as he holds that true knowledge not only relies on an adequate representation of the external object in the mind, but also on a genuine relationship between the subject and God. Here, he takes over elements from Platonism insofar as he can say that we get true knowledge insofar as we know God. But, in fact, this Platonic language is now read through the lens of the love of God as the source of loving one's neighbour, the New Testament summary of the Old Testament Decalogue.

As mentioned above, the denial of the divinity of the soul has yet another consequence concerning the nature of memory. In Platonism, memory is essentially static, as it is nothing but the traces of the eternal ideas in the individual soul. Hence, in a Platonic anthropology, there is no possibility of thinking of the historicity of the human subject, because the soul as participating in the divine Nous is not in any sense affected by the temporal history of the body. In Augustine, as we have seen, this is different. Augustine's conception of memory, due to its being cut off from the divine realm, is of a much more dynamic nature. Thus, memory takes up the concrete history of the subject rather than being the mere 'copy' of the eternal ideas. This, then, is the theoretical background against which something like the *Confessiones*, as the concrete history of a human being, in which previous experiences influence later ones, can be accounted for in a philosophical way.[14]

5.5. Plotinus, Augustine and Radical Orthodoxy

The implication of the Plotinian system, as we have introduced it in the previous subsection, is a hierarchical relationship between the One and everything else, a hierarchy that is caused by the ever increasing connection of being to matter. The stronger something is intertwined with matter, the lower its status as true, good and beautiful. This hierarchy of being as ordered towards the purity of the One also implies a preference for unity over multiplicity, of identity over difference. Therefore, many textbooks speak about Platonism as a 'dualistic' system. Formally, this is false because in Platonism – as distinct from Gnosticism – matter is not a principle in and of itself. In Plotinus, matter originates in the One as much as does being because if the One – as being that

[14] The difference is beautifully illustrated by the beginning of Porphyry's *On the Life of Plotinus*, where Porphyry mentions Plotinus' distaste for telling biographical details (*On the Life of Plotinus*, 1).

which has nothing opposite to it – appears in being, it necessarily appears as that which has something opposite over against itself. Materially, however, the aim of knowledge as a return to unity implies a negative view of matter. In fact, even when evil does not exist at an ontological level, evil and matter as the lack of being coincide.

This is where the position of Radical Orthodoxy comes in. Radical Orthodoxy sees itself as an exponent of what they call an 'Augustinian Christian Platonism'. Part of this Christian Platonism is a rejection of the negative view of matter seeing matter as created by God and thus as part of being. This, however, also implies another view of the relationship between unity and multiplicity. At this point, Pickstock's now famous 'liturgical consummation of philosophy' finds its role to play. In the first chapter of this book, Pickstock develops an argument against Derrida's critique of Plato and, more generally, against a dualist interpretation of Plato's philosophy. Eli Diamond aptly describes Pickstock's view as follows: 'The world is the site of the actual unification of the divine with nature and humanity. Yet because God is indeterminate and wholly beyond thought, the presence of the divine cannot be intellectually apprehended, but only ritually experienced.'[15]

Pickstock attempts to do away with the dualist implications of Platonism by stressing the ritual nature of our apprehension of the good. She argues that there is no 'metaphysics of presence' in Plato because Plato does not in any sense claim access to the good, as Derrida seems to suggest. Orality in Plato is, thus, preferred precisely because there is no direct access to God/the good, which renders all speech, writing or whatever as provisional when applied to God. Everything participates in the good, but precisely in such a way as to keep the good itself transcendent.[16] For Pickstock, this is then reason enough to suggest that the transcendence of the good in Plato does not lead to a turning away from the embodiment of our way of dealing with the good.[17] This, then, is also the reason why all human apprehension of the good must be liturgical, as there is no rational grasp of the good as it is in itself.[18]

Still, it seems that in Pickstock's emphasis on the transcendence of the good and the merely liturgical apprehension of it, there is still at least a certain level of duality involved in the Radical Orthodox account of truth and knowledge. If the good is transcendent and needs to be apprehended by a

[15] Diamond, 'Pickstock, Plato and the Unity of Divinity and Humanity', 1.

[16] Pickstock, *After Writing*, 11–13.

[17] Pickstock, *After Writing*, 13–20.

[18] Pickstock, *After Writing*, 37–46. Diamond and Hankey have criticized Pickstock's reading of Plato(nism) because in Platonism, human apprehension, notwithstanding the transcendence of the good, is always aspired for in a rational way, through the intellect. Diamond, 'Pickstock, Plato and the Unity of Divinity and Humanity', 1–16; Wayne J. Hankey, 'Philosophical Religion and the Neoplatonic Turn to the Subject', in Hankey and Hedley, *Deconstructing Radical Orthodoxy: Postmodern Theology, Rhetoric and Truth*, 17–30.

liturgical act, it is clear that the world we live in, even if it exists by participating in the good, is not the good itself. If the world we live in were the good itself in a non-dualist way, there would be no need at all to emphasize the transcendence of the good/One, nor would there be any reason to approach it liturgically. If we were 'in' the good in a truly non-dualist way, the liturgical act would be a mere celebration of our present condition. Such a view, however, would do away with our dependence on the good as transcendent, which is, as such, unavailable to us. Thus, it would do away with the typically Radical Orthodox emphasis on the priority of God over the creation and our dependence on grace.

In other and later writings of Radical Orthodoxy, however, we see an increasing tendency to drop the duality that we have seen in Pickstock's *After Writing*. A good example of where we see this tendency is Pickstock and Milbank's *Truth in Aquinas*.[19] In their reading of Aquinas, Pickstock and Milbank develop a participatory alternative to the post-Enlightenment dominance of a correspondence theory of truth, an alternative that they present as a participatory theory of knowledge.[20] In this book, one finds references to the traditional duality between God and the world, and an attempt to think of the relationship between God and the world in a much more radically monist way. An example of the latter is this quotation from the first chapter of *Truth in Aquinas*, introducing Aquinas' participatory account of truth – of course as Milbank and Pickstock see it:

> A thing is fulfilling its telos when it is *copying God in its own manner*, and tending to existence as knowledge in the divine Mind: so a tree copies God by being true to its treeness, rain by being rainy, and so on. If a thing is truest when it is teleologically directed, and that means when a thing is copying God, this would suggest, as Aquinas indeed affirms, that truth is primarily in the Mind of God and only secondarily in things as copying the Mind of God.[21]

Here, Milbank and Pickstock clearly break with the duality between transcendence and immanence, as the world 'copies' God, that is, fundamentally, it seems that God appears in the world not as something else than God is in eternity. The order of priority and thus the order of grace, by which the world depends on God, is now merely an order of initiative. The world is a copy of God, but God is not a copy of the world. There is no duality anymore at the epistemological level. God is no longer transcendent in the sense of not being accessible to human reason, as it is now explicitly stated that to know is to have a look into the mind of God. This also changes the function

[19] Milbank and Pickstock, *Truth in Aquinas*.
[20] Milbank and Pickstock, *Truth in Aquinas*, xi–xiv, 1–9.
[21] Milbank and Pickstock, *Truth in Aquinas*, 9–10; emphasis in original.

of the liturgical apprehension. The liturgical apprehension is now no longer needed for the fact that God is epistemologically 'unavailable', but because the true nature of known things is their teleologically ordered nature towards the good/God. Hence, things are only properly known if known as existing in God. The doxology does not apprehend someone principally unknown because unknowable, but the doxology celebrates the origin of the universe; it is, as it were, the faithful recognition of the world as a copy of God.

The ontological parallel between, and unity of, God and the world is all the more clear in those passages in which the relation between God and the world is described as something that happens *in God*:

> One could even say, given the foregoing, that for Aquinas, as he indeed affirms, knowledge is God's perpetual return to Himself. This is not a movement in the sense of a discursive passage from known to unknown, but a kind of encircling, a movement out of Himself and returning to Himself, always already completed from the beginning of eternity. For God, in knowing His own essence, also knows other things in which He sees a likeness of Himself, since He grasps Himself as participable, and so He here returns to His essence.[22]

Here, the world is not only seen as a copy of God, but in fact becomes a moment in the divine life itself. This idea of the world as a 'Word' spoken between the Father and Son, a 'Gift' shared between them, is particularly central in the recent work of Milbank.[23] It is theologically justified by reference to a Trinitarian reconceptualization of 'Proclean and Iamblichian' Platonism.[24]

Still, in *Truth in Aquinas*, there remain references to a more Plotinian dualist view of the relationship between God and the world, as, for example, when it is said that 'For Aquinas the place of truth is manifold and hierarchical, and one finds it gradually by means of an ascending scale.'[25] Whatever their relationship to the monist tendency in Radical Orthodoxy, it is clear that Pickstock's emphasis on the unknowability of the good/One can no longer be retained. The idea of a copy between God and the world, where difference versus unity in the world becomes entirely in parallel to difference versus unity in God, makes for a God that is eventually fully transparent to the believer. This is all the more so when the theological and philosophical

[22] Milbank and Pickstock, *Truth in Aquinas*, 12.
[23] Milbank, *Being Reconciled*.
[24] For a discussion of the links to Proclos and Iamblichus, see Diamond, 'Pickstock, Plato and the Unity of Divinity and Humanity', 1–16; Hankey, 'Philosophical Religion and the Neoplatonic Turn to the Subject', 17–30.
[25] Milbank and Pickstock, *Truth in Aquinas*, 9.

account of the relationship between God and the world is made into a matrix for the ordering of society and economics.[26]

If we look back from Radical Orthodoxy's participatory account of truth to Augustine, there is a *prima facie* similarity between Radical Orthodoxy's 'doxological view' of reality and Augustine's view of knowledge as dependent on a genuine relationship to God.[27] As Radical Orthodoxy claims that we only grasp reality according to its true nature if we see it as dependent on God, and, thus, every genuine act of knowledge is a knowledge of reality according to its real purpose, namely, the purpose God created it for, Radical Orthodoxy and Augustine share a concern about the relationship to God as the foundation of true knowledge.

Still, upon closer scrutiny, this *prima facie* similarity turns out to be much weaker than it seems. The most fundamental difference in the end, I believe, is between Augustine's account of creation versus Radical Orthodoxy's, that is, between an account of creation as an act of genuine freedom and an account in terms of 'copying'.' This fundamental point, however, would take much more space to argue than is available to me here. Therefore, I will leave the ontological question aside, and concentrate on the epistemological questions.

Although there is a dependency on God for true knowledge in Radical Orthodoxy, this dependency is of another kind than the one we find in Augustine. In Radical Orthodoxy, this dependency is located in the things themselves. In Augustine, it is located in the knowing subject, more precisely in the will. Let me explain this in a bit more detail. If something is first and in the most real sense in the mind of God and only secondarily in creation, I will indeed not grasp the creation fully when I do not take recourse to God as its origin. When I do not know God as the source of everything, I will miss something about its origin and ultimate purpose, but given that the purpose of things is implanted in the things themselves, I will still be able to know much.[28] The only problem of the human condi-

[26] Milbank, *Being Reconciled*, 162–187; D. Stephen Long, *Divine Economy: Theology and the Market* (Radical Orthodoxy Series; London: Routledge, 2000).

[27] I will leave the question of Radical Orthodoxy's relationship to Aquinas to others. Milbank and Pickstock do not seem to see any difference between their own views and their interpretation of Aquinas. Others do see enormous differences; see, for example, John Marenbon, 'Aquinas, Radical Orthodoxy and the Importance of Truth', in Hankey and Hedley, *Deconstructing Radical Orthodoxy: Postmodern Theology, Rhetoric and Truth*, 49–64. I will also skip a discussion of Radical Orthodoxy's relationship to Plotinian Platonism. In my opinion, Radical Orthodoxy overstates the difference between Plotinian and Proclean/Iamblichian Platonism.

[28] This insight is at the heart of Radical Orthodoxy's view of the relationship between faith and reason, where the relative independence of reason in Aquinas is construed in theological terms (Milbank and Pickstock, *Truth in Aquinas*, 19–59). If everything is in

tion after the fall, according to Radical Orthodoxy, or so it seems, is that I have lost track of upon whom I am dependent. Someone needs to tell me. And when I, after someone has told me, acknowledge the true condition of the world and celebrate it in acts of doxology, everything is in order.

This is where the difference with Augustine comes in. In Augustine, the dependence on God is not so much located at a noetic level, that is, at the level of knowing the true state of the creation. For Augustine indeed, a non-Christian philosophy may indeed come to the conclusion that the world has been created by someone who is not a part of that creation – this is the achievement of Neoplatonism. The problem is not so much the noetic capability of us humans. The primary problem is our volutative capability. The main difference between Radical Orthodoxy and Augustine is that the former has an underdeveloped account of the human subject and its will, whereas the latter sees the dependence on God as located in that subject and its will. This makes the dependence on God for true knowledge to happen more pressing, on the one hand, but also more relaxed, on the other. On the one hand, it is more pressing in the sense that, for true knowledge to be possible, a merely cognitive correction is not sufficient. I need a relationship to God that concerns my human identity as a subject rather than merely as a cognitive recognition of the origin of creation. On the other hand, it is more relaxed in the sense that once I lack this relationship, I might still, at a cognitive level, perform full acts of knowledge.[29] Thus, one might say, Radical Orthodoxy's lack of a clear account of the subject is more Platonic than Augustinian, whereas Augustine's subject is rather modern, although rejecting the idea of an autonomous subject.

Underlying the difference between Radical Orthodoxy and Augustine is a different view of the relationship between truth and being. In Augustine, different from Radical Orthodoxy, truth is no longer convertible with being. Because, in Augustine, truth as an epistemological category is codependent on the condition of the knower, to truly know something cannot be restricted to the noetic capabilities of the subject. Accordingly, I will deal with the rela-

God, we cannot as it were 'fall out' of God and therefore, we can already grasp our true condition independent from revelation. We are able to know that we are dependent; we only need revelation to know upon whom we are dependent.

[29] In terms of Augustine's view of human freedom, this point can be made in terms of the distinction between *libertas boni*, a freedom for the good, which is lost by sin, and *liberum arbitrium*, which is a human being's fundamental ability to act freely, which is still retained even after sin. For this distinction, see Mathijs Lamberigts, 'De polemiek tussen Julianus van Aeclanum en Augustinus van Hippo: een bijdrage tot de theologiegeschiedenis van de tweede pelagiaanse controverse (418–430)' (Ph.D. thesis, Katholieke Universiteit Leuven; Leuven, 1988), 2/1, 79ff.

tionship between the transcendentals in Augustine versus the Platonic tradition in the next section.

5.6. The Trinity in Outer Man and the Relations between the Transcendentals

We have started from a close reading of the trinity in outer man, as Augustine develops it in book 11 of *De Trinitate*, after which we have confronted Augustine's view of perception, knowledge and truth with the Platonic tradition and Radical Orthodoxy.

During this procedure, much has already been said about the consequences of Augustine's trinity in outer man for a theory of truth. However, in this section, we take even more distance from the historical perspective and have a final round of reflection in terms of the classical theory of truth as identical to being and, as such, identical to goodness and beauty.

It is standing tradition to hold that in the Platonic tradition, among which Augustine is mostly counted too, the transcendentals are one with being. As Robert O'Connell remarks, for Augustine, 'truth is fundamentally identical with beauty'.[30] In the Platonic tradition, to find the truth is to find one's ultimate state of being, the process of returning to the ultimate unity that being is – or more precisely, the inexpressible unity that the One is. Ultimately, truth is found along the way of rationality, of the thinking individual, as, for example, Augustine in book 7 of the *Confessiones* finds God as the one who is, and when following this way upwards, Augustine is alone. Basically, this tradition is also the basis of the idea that goodness is found in rationality, in conforming oneself – or being conformed – to the true state of the world that one has discovered through thought. Similarly, the beauty of the world is its rational structure, its being itself. Being, therefore, as the structure of the rationality of the world, cannot be handled in a personal way. The idea that from the other side of the thinking mind, there might be someone who distorts this whole structure of rationality by acting in a free way is ultimately dangerous to the whole paradigm.[31] Being itself as the ultimate unity in which everything participates is best kept quiet. Hence arise all the problems of the Christian tradition concerning the idea of a God

[30] Robert J. O'Connell, *Art and the Christian Intelligence in St. Augustine* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978), 29.

[31] One might say, of course, that Radical Orthodoxy's Trinitarian transformation – and perhaps Aquinas' on which it claims to rely – of the Platonic tradition does away with this impersonal character of the One, but I am not sure of this. Radical Orthodoxy's Trinity is completely functionalized in its analogical unfolding into the plenitude of the world. Persons cannot be functionalized, I would say.

who is thought along the lines of a Platonic absolute, a self-contained and self-satisfied principle rather than a personal God.

The Christian tradition, deeply influenced as it was by Platonism, has always struggled with the Platonic legacy that became deeply entangled with its intellectual history. Here in Augustine, I believe, we have one of the finest attempts of transforming the Platonic paradigm into something genuinely Christian. As we have seen, Augustine's holy One is personalized, a transformation that he describes as something he discovered even before his definitive conversion to Christianity.[32] This personal nature of the Trinity, as that is what the holy One turns out to be, effectively destroys the identity/coincidence of the transcendentals.

The aspect of rationality in the human mind and the world is now no longer the ontological overflow of the rationality of the Trinity into the rationality of the world. Rather, the rationality of the world is the contingent result of the creativity of God in creating whatever God likes. Hence, whatever applies to the world does not automatically apply to the Creator, and, accordingly, an authentic relationship with God is necessary for the proper unravelling of the rational structure of the universe.[33] A Platonic ascent can be phrased as follows: one begins the ascent by investigating the inner rationality of the lowest elements of the universe, and, in investigating these, one will automatically be moved towards the highest form of rationality, the spirit, as it is by virtue and in expression of the highest form of rationality that the lowest forms of being exist. In Augustine, however, this does not work, as properly dealing with the lowest elements of the universe *requires* an existing genuine relationship to the Creator of this universe, which is even beyond the highest level of the universe. What's more, the independent engagement with these lowest elements, indeed, exactly these, is ultimately dangerous as these lowest elements will not lead one upward, but rather keep one below.

This brings us to the second transcendental: goodness. In Augustine's theology, goodness is not identical to truth. Investigating the true state of being does not make a just man, according to Augustine. Being just, virtue, does not reside *in* or rely *on* rationality. The reverse is true: one needs to be a just human being to be able to investigate the true state of being. This is crucial for Augustine's understanding of the Church, as it means that the Church does not need to consist of philosophers at all. This point has important implications for the understanding of truth. Both truth and goodness rely on the right relationship to God, but they cannot be reduced to each other. Truth as insight into the rationality of creation requires the good life, but the

[32] Here, I mean the revelation of God as 'I am who I am' over against the Platonic 'nothing' in *conf.* 7.10.16.

[33] This is not to suggest that sinful human beings understand nothing of the universe, but that their understanding of the world is confused by a disordered will.

reverse is also true: the good life requires a certain level of insight into the nature of the universe, namely, its nature as creation.

Finally, we come to beauty. As with the two other transcendentals, beauty in Augustine does not simply coincide with either truth or goodness or both. In Augustine, beauty can be extremely dangerous once it is not bound up with both truth and goodness. That is, if the beauty of the world is not taken in its proper relationship to God as the creator, such a kind of beauty is not real beauty at all and is, as such, deceptive. Thus, once there is truth and goodness in the true sense of the two terms, there will be beauty too. Still, this beauty is not the same as truth or goodness in the sense that it is the truth or the goodness that makes up the beauty. It is not the beauty of the rational structure of the world, but rather the creativity and freedom of the Creator, and, similarly human free agents as creators, one might say the *personality* of the Creator, which appear to the human subject as beautiful.

5.7. Consequences for a Contemporary Theory of Theological Truth

Let us finally bring the foregoing discussion to bear on the question of theological truth. If the transcendentals are not identical, this means that truth cannot without qualification be identified with being. This is true not only on the level of creation, where it means that being created does not automatically mean to participate in God, but it is also true on the level of soteriology. A non-participationist view of theological truth would then mean that to be part of a soteriological body does not automatically imply being saved. Being a good creature as well as being saved depends on being *bonae voluntatis*, and in Augustine's theology, being *bonae voluntatis* is neither something that one is by default, nor something that one can become at will.

Consequently, one cannot identify some entity in the world, some institution, body of texts or a ritual, something which is in the believer's power, with the believer's participating in the truth. Truth depends on goodness and beauty, and these cannot simply be derived from being. Participating in a liturgy, for example, does not automatically make me someone fit for receiving it with a proper disposition. But, even more so, participating in the liturgy does not automatically make me someone who is in a genuine relationship with God, which is a requirement for knowing the truth.

From this perspective, the old controversy between Protestants and Roman Catholics over the question of whether the anchor point of orthodoxy should be Scripture alone or Scripture and tradition, from Augustine's point of view, is a meaningless question. Of course it should be more than Scripture alone, as, for truth to be found, a community of faith and justice is the absolute requirement for a faithful reading practice of this text to take place. But, of course, at the same time, it cannot be that truth consists in some fixed

institutional context either, as the community of justice finds its fulfilment in the creative presence of God rather than the fixed pinning down of God's presence in some earthly phenomenon.

In the end, if we take Augustine's account of theology as prayer seriously, and I think the main thrust of the theoretical analysis in *De Trinitate* obliges us to do so, we should say that for Augustine, truth can never be said to be something at our human disposal. In the end, only God is truth and the truth of our human knowledge of it is in our searching for it rather than in possessing it (cf. 9.1). And even the idea insistently denying being in possession of the truth will not bring us any further, as we could do so without a genuine relationship with God. The pain of this position is exactly in this term 'genuine'. It means we cannot give one another a set of criteria to determine when the relationship will be genuine or not. If it is not God who is Trinity as present among us, all is lost.

This, finally also, characterizes the knowledge of God and the world within the postlapsarian and pre-eschatological situation as given by the Holy Spirit, freely present within the community of the Church. 'Freely' here means that the Spirit can never be identified with human beings, institutions or rituals. For the community of faith, there is never an escape from the concrete dependency on the creative presence of God within the actual particular situation within which it finds itself.

6

SOTERIOLOGY

6.1. Introduction: The Argument So Far

In previous chapters, I have already referred to the difficulty of Augustine's argument, especially in the second half of *De Trinitate*. The difficulty of the argument presses the reader's ability to the utmost extreme to get a grasp of the whole of the argument. Augustine himself, after reviewing an argument that grew over many years, shows that he is aware of this problem in book 15, where he announces his own summary of the overall argument:

> But the requirements of discussion and argument through the course of fourteen books have obliged us to say many things which we are unable to look at all at once, and so refer them at a glance to the thing we are eager to apprehend. With the Lord's help therefore, I will try as best I can to summarize briefly without argument the points of knowledge which I established by long argument in each book. I will not set before the mind an account of the course of each individual argument, but a list of the things argued for, so that it may take them in at a single glance, and not find the things that come later so far away from the things which went before, that examination of the former makes it forget the latter. Or at least if this does happen, it will be easy to recall what has slipped the mind by reading it again. (15.4)

In my interpretation of Augustine, I have done my best to explain what Augustine wants to say, but, in a certain respect, I have complicated Augustine's argument even further by bringing it into dialogue with modern and postmodern thinkers. This is all the more reason to follow in Augustine's footsteps and to summarize the argument so far before we take the final step: a discussion of the last four books of *De Trinitate*.

In the first chapter, I concentrated merely on the first sentences of Augustine's work in order to bring out his criticism of Plotinian Platonism. Augustine criticizes Plotinus' totally negative conception of the One as a form of projection because something that is thought of in a completely negative way, and

thus beyond any human conceptuality, will in fact be fully dependent on such human conceptualizations. Through an interpretation of the relationship between Plotinus and Hegel in the work of Jens Halfwassen, I have tried to turn Augustine's argument into a critique of a specific type of Western metaphysics. The defining characteristics of this metaphysics are as follows: (1) an initial moment of absolute transcendence, (2) a mediating structure in which this absolute transcendence becomes visible and realizes itself, but never in a direct and complete way and (3) the affirmation of this initial moment of negativity, the mediating structure and our acknowledgement of it as the ultimate totality of being. Thus, the meaning of the initial moment of negativity is in fact totally determined by its outflow in the mediating structure. At the end of the chapter, I have applied the reconstruction of this type of metaphysics to the theological thinking of Denys Turner and Graham Ward.

In the second chapter, I have developed the systematic thesis of this book in terms of an analysis of books 5–7: the discussion of the Trinity 'proper'. Through a close reading of key passages from these books, I have shown that Augustine develops a concept of God as Trinity that is intentionally 'irrational' and cannot be functionalized along the lines of God's history with the world. God appears in revelation as Trinity, but this Trinity cannot be rendered comprehensible along the lines of the 'emanation' of God in creation, or along the lines of a relational ontology. This leads once again to a strong emphasis on the otherness of God and on our dependence on God's concrete revelation in history as a key to our knowledge of God. It leads also to a specific view of the relationship between God and history. Since God cannot be conceptualized nor represented in language, our knowledge of God is radically dependent on concrete encounters with God in history. At the same time, God remains opposite to this history and independent from it. At the end of the chapter, I have shown how Augustine's theology offers an alternative to contemporary systematic theology in terms of a discussion of Joseph Ratzinger's Trinitarian theology.

In the third chapter, I have shown the consequences of Augustine's theological starting-point in revelation for his Christology. To make the contrast between modern Christology and Augustine's view clear from the outset, I started the chapter in the present, with a discussion of John Milbank and Catherine Pickstock's Christology. I presented their Christology as an example of the twentieth-century interest in the ontological nature of God as being in act. In my critique of this type of Christology, I have taken up an element from the argumentation in the first chapter, where I argued that in a Christology along the lines of a participatory metaphysics the incarnation becomes a mere illustration of the ontological structure of reality stripping the incarnation of its historicity and unicity. After showing how the ontological interest in modern Christology influences contemporary scholarship's inquiries into Augustine's Christology, I have tried to draw the main lines characterizing the Christological books 1, 4 and 13 of *De Trinitate*. It turns

out that Augustine problematizes the two natures in the one person of Christ to only a very limited extent, and, therefore, he also functionalizes them only to a limited extent soteriologically. In line with the impossibility of reconstructing the concept of the Trinity who God is, the unity of the two natures of Christ cannot be reconstructed. Augustine prepares for the Chalcedonian consensus in the sense that he says how the relationship between the two natures in the union of the one person must *not* be thought, but does not say how it can be thought. Theology must keep silent in certain areas to speak all the more meaningful in others.

This theological speech is then all the more meaningful in the area of anthropology. At the beginning of this chapter, I introduced my heuristic instrument for the interpretation of the second half of *De Trinitate* over against existing approaches. Subsequently, I presented a close reading of books 8–10, outlining a Trinitarian fundamental theological anthropology, but not one based on a parallel between the ontological structure of God and creation. Human beings are constituted by a Trinitarian structure precisely because the otherness of God as Trinity remains intact. The relationship between God and human beings constitutes what it means to be human, but precisely because of its unique character. This unique character is rooted in the impossibility of aligning God to anything in the created order. At the end of the chapter, I made the insights gained from Augustine's argument valuable for contemporary theology in terms of a comparison with Pannenberg's anthropology.

The anthropological questions return in the chapter on knowledge and perception, focussing on Augustine's argument in book 11. A metaphysics of participation leads to an epistemology in which the knower and the known ultimately coincide. In such an epistemology, the role of the subject is eventually 'erased' because the aim of knowledge is the identity between subject and object. I argued that in Augustine, the otherness of God over against creation implies the denial of the identity between subject and object as the ultimate aim of knowledge. In Augustine, the aim of knowledge is rather the respect for the otherness of the other, both in respect to God and to other creatures. Thus, the question of knowledge is not simply one of correct representation, but one of the justice and spiritual health of the knowing subject, allowing the subject to respect the otherness of the other rather than reducing the other to a copy of oneself. This view of epistemology is then confronted with that of John Milbank and Catherine Pickstock to bring out the contrast between Augustine's theology and a metaphysics of participation.

Up to now, we have seen that the rejection of a metaphysics of participation leads to an emphasis on revelation in theology, to a non-representational concept of the Trinity, a Chalcedonian Christology, and a critique of a parallel between the social nature of God as Trinity and human beings as social beings. In soteriology, it must nowadays lead to a critique of deification or, with the Greek term, *theosis*. At the end of this chapter, I will make a contemporary application of Augustine's soteriology in terms of a critique of

perhaps the most fashionable concept in systematic theology today. But before we confront the question of soteriology in contemporary systematic theology, we need to follow Augustine's argument in books 12–15.

6.2. Book 12: Science versus Wisdom

Books 12–14 might be called the great soteriological 'bypass'. Human beings are created in the image of God. This image has not been lost, but it has been corrupted, and salvation is needed to regain the vision of God. Salvation, however, as we have already seen in books 4 and book 8, depends on faith, that is, faith in Christ, and Christ is a material reality. Thus, faith in external temporal and material things is necessary for regaining the vision of God who is immaterial, eternal and to be found through a turn inwards and upwards.

Such a bypass is less obvious to Augustine's original readers than to those familiar with a long history of a Christian culture. Such a bypass to the restoration of one's spiritual health sounds very strange to ears accustomed to the shortest route into the divine through the ascent of reason. Reason is higher because it is immaterial. How can faith in material things clean one's mind? Basically this is what Augustine is going to explain in books 12–14. At the beginning of book 12, Augustine formulates the distinct view of a Christian worldview like this:

> But just as our body is raised up by nature to what is highest in bodies, that is, to the heavens, so our consciousness being a spiritual substance should be raised up toward what is highest in spiritual things – not of course by the elevation of pride but by the *dutiful piety of justice*. (12.1; my emphasis)

In this quote, we recognize Augustine's critique of the pride of the Platonists, who see their own minds as divine and think that they can ascend into God through a liberation of the mind from the bounds of matter. Matter is not the problem, Augustine holds, but this pride is the problem. Rather than submitting oneself to God, one believes oneself to be God. What is needed is the dutifulness of righteousness, and this righteousness can only be reached through faith in Christ.

6.2.1. The Image of the Trinity in Men and Women

All of this has been dealt with before in books 8–11. Everything seems ready for the introduction of the bypass through faith in Christ. Still the introduction of that bypass has to wait until the end of book 12. In between, we find a major discussion of something that seems rather foreign to the main line of argument: the question of whether a married couple with a child could function as an

image of the Trinity and, in its wake, the question of whether only a man is an image of the Trinity, or whether a woman may also be such an image. Concerning the second question, Augustine seeks extensively for a balance between two scriptural texts: Genesis 1 on the one hand, where it is said that human beings were created in the image of God, male and female, and 1 Corinthians 11.7 on the other, where a man is said not to cover his head because he is the image of God, while the woman is the image of the man.

There are links between the soteriological issues that figure in this book 12 and the question of gender, perhaps even more concrete links than readers today will notice. The fact that the discussion of the married couple and gender falls a bit out of the scope of the highly abstract and intellectual argument of the second half of *De Trinitate* should not close our eyes to the fact that his argument fits very well into the work as a whole. The idea that the Trinity can be aligned to the hierarchical ordering of the universe has a parallel in a subordinationist view of the Trinity, a dualist view in the mind, a patriarchal view of gender, and a negative view of matter. Augustine is positive about matter as the lowest thing that God created, but still part of God's good creation. Augustine rejects also the parallel between hierarchy and gender, and finally, he rejects a subordinationist view of the Trinity.

Thus, what Augustine addresses here in book 12 is a whole web of alternative worldviews and soteriologies that probably were very popular in the cultural milieu of his readers, which probably were popular even among the readers themselves. In such alternative ontologies and soteriologies, a negative view of women easily went along with a negative view of matter, as well as the idea of a divine soul as a spark incarcerated in the body. The soteriology aligned to this was then to liberate the masculine soul from its bounds to matter, the body and, of course, to dependence on sexuality as dependence on the other sex. Such a soteriology is not only very problematic from a gender-perspective, it is also dangerous to Augustine's view of Christianity because according to Augustine salvation does not consist in getting rid of one's body, but in becoming righteous through faith in Christ.

Another link between the question of the image of the Trinity in the married couple and the rest of the argument in *De Trinitate* is what we have called the fourth level in our heuristic instrument (cf. section 5.2) – the level on which Augustine looks for an image of God in the created order. The married couple with a child is presented as an obvious case of such an image, although upon closer scrutiny it is ultimately rejected. From the perspective of this question of an image, we can understand why Augustine discusses it here before he introduces the soteriological bypass. If there were an image readily available in the married couple, this would render the bypass superfluous or at least of a radically different nature. It would be a bypass in the sense of leading the believer back to the *visio Dei* through the vision of external things, but not through faith in Christ, which is Augustine's ultimate aim. As such, the possibility of an image of the Trinity

in a married couple is an escape that is most unwelcome to the strategy of Augustine's argument.

On the level of the flow of the argument, Augustine construes a link between the two themes in terms of an allegorical reading of the Corinthians text. He basically rejects the literal meaning of the text and interprets the allegorical meaning through the two parts of the soul, one masculine and one feminine. Through the allegorical reading of the Corinthians text, Augustine manages to play down the patriarchal aspects of the text emphasizing the equalizing effects of the Genesis text at the cost of the Corinthians text. Thus, Augustine links the key distinction between science and wisdom that figures at the end of the book together with the question of gender. Science is aligned to the feminine part of the mind, which is directed towards external things, and wisdom is aligned to the masculine part of the mind, which is directed towards eternal things.

Augustine needs 12.4 to 12.12 to reach these goals. Paul's saying in Corinthians in particular causes Augustine to make a lengthy argument in order to maintain its authority while circumventing its all too patriarchal consequences. It takes more than the first half of the book to get rid of these problems, and he comes back to the issue in 12.20. The main arguments are not that complicated. On the exegetical level, Augustine pushes Genesis 1 and the fact that the individual person is created in the image of God rather than that of a couple (12.5–7). Theological consequences are added to this exegetical level, such as the fact that if the image of God was in the couple, the image of God would not even be in man, whence it needs to be in both a man and a woman independently (12.8), rather than only in man, as Paul's problematic statement has it. The Corinthians text is then taken allegorically and reconciled with the text from Genesis (12.9–11). Finally, an anthropological argument is brought in. Augustine repeats the fact that the image of God is in the highest part of the mind, in reason, so that there can be no question of masculinity or femininity there, since the mind is spiritual rather than corporeal (12.12).

I am not going to pay much attention to the question of gender in book 12. The issue has been studied extensively and a scholarly consensus has been reached with which I completely concur.[1] This consensus is that Augustine's argument has both positive and negative aspects when seen from a gender-perspective. The positive aspects are his downplaying of the text from Corinthians and his defence of the image of God in men and women alike. It is also positive, as recent research has rightly noted, that Augustine does not identify the female aspect with the body but with the mind, albeit the part of the mind that is directed towards external things. The price to be paid for Augustine's hermeneutical strategy is that somewhere in his argument, he needs to give the hierarchical aspects of the Corinthians text a place in order

[1] For an excellent summary of existing research see Kany, *Augustins Trinitätsdenken,* 235–237.

to uphold its authority. The place it receives is in the order of the different parts of reason, the lower part being directed to external things and the highest part being directed to the contemplation of eternal things. To Augustine's credit, he stresses the unity between the two parts of the intellect at the beginning of the book, so that one might say that the difference between the two parts of the intellect has more to do with direction than with subordination. Still, the male part is said to be directed to the highest things, which leaves a patriarchal aspect present in Augustine's argument.

6.2.2. The Fall

From 12.13 onwards, a theme is introduced that is crucial to the soteriological focus of this chapter. The theme of the image of God in a couple or a single human being shifts towards the theme of the distortion of true humanity due to sin. It is probably justified to say that although Augustine does not add many new insights concerning his notion of sin, compared to the other books, book 12 provides the most extensive account of sin. In 12.13 the previous discussion is closed and the next one is opened in a smooth transition. Augustine closes the discussion of the masculine and the feminine part of the mind. The first is, as we have seen, directed towards God and the intelligible world, and the second is directed towards the material and external world. Augustine stressed the unity of both in the one human intellect, as is also evident from the beginning of this quotation:

> So in their [male and female, MW] minds a common nature is to be acknowledged; but in their bodies the distribution of the one mind is symbolized. As we climb up inward then through the parts of the soul by certain steps of reflection, we begin to come upon something that is not common to us and the beasts, and that is where reason begins, and where we can now recognize the inner man. (12.12–13)

What we see here is the introduction of the theme of ascent. This is a play again with a Platonic way of thinking in which the way to salvation consists in a turn upwards and inwards. As we have seen before, however, for Augustine the way to salvation is not that easy because there is no divine soul within human beings that one can turn to to find God built into one's very own nature. This is now immediately and powerfully exploited in what immediately follows:

> But through that reason which has been delegated to administer temporal affairs he may slide too much into outer things by making unrestrained advances; and in this the active reason may have the consent of her head; that is to say the reason which presides as the masculine portion in the control tower of counsel may fail to curb her. In such a

> case the inner man grows old among his enemies, demons and the devil their chief who are jealous of virtue, and the sight of eternal things is withdrawn from the head himself as he eats the forbidden fruit with his consort, so that the light of his eyes is no longer with him. Thus they are both stripped naked of the enlightenment of truth, and the eyes of conscience are opened to see what a shameful and indecent state they have left themselves in. So they sew together as it were the leaves of delightful fruits without the fruits themselves, which is to say, they sew together fine words without the fruit of good works, in order while living badly to cover up their baseness by speaking well. (12.13)

Notice how, at the end of the quotation, Augustine contrasts 'speaking well' with doing it, which is an alternate and more appealing way of putting his distinction between knowing the good, which all do to some extent, and doing it. Basically, this is a familiar theme because what Augustine describes here is very similar to his argument in book 10, where he argued that if the mind that knows itself no longer obeys its true nature, namely, submission to God and the just government of the body, then the mind becomes filled with images of corporeal things, becomes anxious and loses self-knowledge.

The language that Augustine uses here, however, takes more of a narrative form and bolder statements are made. The language is in fact the language of Genesis, as Augustine now uses the language of the 'masculine' and the 'feminine' part of the soul to describe the fall of the soul towards sin as a fall like Adam and Eve's. In parallel to book 10, the fall is not primarily one from unity to multiplicity, or from God to matter, but one from a good way of looking at oneself to a false one. The good one is one in which one submits oneself to God, and the false one is one in which one thinks of oneself as God. This latter way is exactly one which the Platonists and Gnostics used when thinking about salvation! The same line of reasoning is continued in 12.14 and seems to last to at least 12.16. The language is that of Platonism with concepts of unity and multiplicity, and the fall from God to matter ruling the language. The meaning of these concepts, however, is that of a Christian concept of the fall as an act of hubris.

More significant, however, is what follows. For the first time ever in *De Trinitate*, Augustine explicitly suggests that the vision of eternal things might be *lost* as a consequence of sin. Up to this point, it still remained unclear whether or not the fallen mind has access to God. Insofar as it knows what it loves and what it longs for, it has; however, at this point, Augustine begins to increase the pressure on the reader towards Christianity. Part of this strategy is to begin to stress the idea that, although God as the highest good is known in some way or other, this knowledge can no longer be operationalized without grace and faith. This increasing pressure is in line with the grace language that we will find in books 13–15 to which we will pay attention below.

6.2.3. The Distinction between Science and Wisdom

One important theme from the end of book 12 still has to be discussed. In the meantime, we have learned to recognize one of Augustine's favourite rhetorical strategies: never give the reader a conclusion at the end of your chapter because they will stop reading. Give them some new food for thought before the end, so that they will continue reading the next book.

Once again, Augustine's intention is to prepare us for things to come, namely, books 13 and 14. Book 13 will deal with the knowledge of temporal things, whereas book 14 will deal with the knowledge of eternal things. Whereas the distinction between science and wisdom was made thus far in an anthropological context, in which the two parts of the mind are distinguished, at the end of book 12 the main distinction is introduced in an explicitly soteriological context. The distinction between science and wisdom is mentioned once again, and it is now introduced in terms of a number of biblical passages. After discussing some passages from Paul, Augustine continues with the following:

> But after searching the multiple stores of the holy scriptures I find it written in the book of Job, in the holy man's own words, *Behold piety is wisdom, while to abstain from evil things is knowledge* (Jb 28:28). This distinction can be understood as meaning that wisdom belongs to contemplation, knowledge to action. He put 'piety' here for 'worship of God,' which in Greek is theosebeia; and this is the word found in this sentence in the Greek codices. (12.22)

In this quotation and what follows, Augustine implicitly but precisely announces what is going to happen in books 13 and 14. *Theosebeia* will be the theme of book 14, where Augustine will return to this theme immediately at the beginning of the book. The second part of the quotation from the book of Job is then discussed a little further:

> To abstain from evil things, however, which Job called knowledge, is without doubt a matter of temporal things, because it is in terms of time that we are in the midst of evils, which we should abstain from in order to arrive at those eternal good things. Thus anything that we do sagaciously, courageously, moderately, and justly belongs to this knowledge or discipline with which our activity sets about avoiding evil and seeking good; and so does whatever historical knowledge we gather for the sake of examples to be avoided or imitated and for the sake of the necessary information about anything at all that has been provided for our use. (12.22)

Augustine has stated very clearly what book 14 will be about, namely, *theosebeia*. In the case of book 13, it is quite a bit more vague and this highlights

something of the rhetorics of Augustine's argument. It is about avoiding evil. Hence it is about right action, but also about desiring the good. Indeed, we will see that the desire for happiness, and how to desire true rather than false happiness, will be a major theme in book 13. But the name of Jesus Christ, which will be the main subject of the book, is not mentioned. Of course it is mentioned, but the reference is very implicit indeed: 'and so does whatever historical knowledge we gather for the sake of examples to be avoided or imitated and for the sake of the necessary information about anything at all that has been provided for our use'.

The two themes of the soteriological books 13 and 14 have now been introduced, but Augustine still feels urged to remove an escape from this necessarily Christian bypass towards salvation before he enters into book 13. As we have seen in Chapter 4, Augustine repeatedly suggests that human beings have access to God through and by nature; however, whether this access can be exploited soteriologically and to what extent has not always been made completely clear. If access to eternal things is implanted in all as a natural thing, one may return to a proper way of dealing with oneself – and thus with one's actions – simply by using one's reason. This would have a very unhappy side-effect, namely, making Christianity superfluous. Augustine opts for another view, although up to this point his view was not unambiguously clear. All have some form of natural access to eternal things implanted in them but this is not accessible to all. As we have seen in this book 12, access is severely hindered by sin.

The purpose of the end of book 12 is to guarantee the basic conditions of possibility of this account by doing away with the possibility that the knowledge of eternal things is implanted in us in such a way as to make them accessible by default. Augustine realizes this through an explicit criticism of Plato:

> This is why that noble philosopher Plato tried to persuade us that the souls of men had lived here even before they wore these bodies, and therefore learning things is more a remembering of things already known than a getting to know new things. . . . The conclusion we should rather draw is that the nature of the intellectual mind has been so established by the disposition of its creator that it is subjoined to intelligible things in the order of nature, and so it sees such truths in a kind of non-bodily light that is *sui generis*, just as our eyes of flesh see all these things that lie around us in this bodily light, a light they were created to be receptive of and to match. (12.24)

In this quotation, Augustine unambiguously affirms what Cary calls 'first in, then up'.[2] Given that God is both other than the world and spiritual rather than material, it is in the spiritual, and not in the external world that God is

[2] Cary, *Augustine's Invention of the Inner Self*, 39.

to be found. Still, 'in' is not enough, and this is the reason why the fall can have such far reaching consequences in Augustine's theology, God is not just inside in a stable divine spark. Rather, God is above the mind, so sin can obscure one's access to the incorporeal light that God is and grace is needed to clear up the sky and to enable the vision of God for the pure of heart. We will see below that these themes return in books 13 and 14 in particular.

6.3. Book 13: Happiness as the Universal Aim of Humans

As we saw in our discussion of book 12, especially at the end of that book, Augustine was already quite concerned about deriving the dominant distinction between wisdom and knowledge from the Scriptures, especially from Paul and the book of Job. At the beginning of book 13, however, he suggests elucidating the distinction in terms of Scripture once again. This is surprising because the distinction is already quite clear – we have been making it since at least book 11, and in fact it has been implicit since book 8. Hence, Augustine must have other reasons for restating the distinction in a different way, this time in terms of a reading of the Prologue to the Gospel of John.

The reason for introducing the distinction in terms of Scripture once again is Augustine's intention to deal with the necessary soteriological role of Jesus Christ in restoring our original spiritual and mental health. Wholly in line with his apologetic intentions, however, Augustine does not play the 'Jesus-card' at the beginning of the book. Rather, he tries to gradually convince his semi-Christian readers of the indispensable and salvific role of Christ. For that reason, he announces a discussion of the distinction in terms of 'Scriptures' (*de scripturis sanctis*) rather than in terms of Jesus Christ.

Apart from the soteriological level, which aims to show that faith in Christ is the only way to true happiness and the vision of God, Augustine keeps construing his argument in terms of the question of an image of God in the Trinity. We will see a similar pattern in book 13 as we saw in previous books, books 9 and 10, for example. Most of the argument in these books does not seem to be about a search for a parallel between things in the created order and God as Trinity. However, Augustine keeps putting the overall argument in these terms. It seems that Augustine presumes that the idea of an image of God in the creaturely world sounds attractive to his Platonically oriented readers. In the meantime, Augustine tries to convince them that they have but one choice to get what they want: they have to become a Christian.

Let me recall again how the different layers in the argument hang together, and then go on to show how they are elaborated in the first half of book 13. The key to the connection between the search for a trinity and the soteriological push towards faith in Christ is to be found in Augustine's favourite quote from the sermon on the mount: 'Blessed are the pure of heart.' The

pure of heart, according to books 9 and 10, submit themselves to God and, thus, both know themselves as they are and rule their lives according to God's commandments. As those free from sin, they have undistorted access to the eternal things, that is, the rules of judgement of God. This reflects the fundamental anthropology that Augustine has been developing in books 8 to 11. If the mind is in such a state, it displays the image of God, as memory, will and understanding are in perfect harmony. Unfortunately, after sin no one is in such a state anymore. The mind suffers from Trinitarian disintegration. The image is still there in some sense or another, but it is distorted and confused, and thus needs to be regained.

Book 13 is then about the way in which it is regained. As an image of the eternal God, the mind's being an image of God should not be affected in any sense by temporal things. The mind needs to reflect the Trinity in its directedness to eternal things. The postlapsarian mind, however, has to a significant extent lost access to the eternal things – book 12 – and thus needs the knowledge of temporal things to regain its original justice to be able to see God once again. So book 13 is intended to show that faith in Christ brings the believer back into his or her so to speak prefallen state – although not yet entirely – so that a trinity, that is, harmony between memory, will and knowledge, is in the mind again, but not yet as the true and original image of God, because the trinity that is in the mind through faith in Christ is a trinity based on contingent things, historical events, and not based on the vision of the eternal things. Paralleling this healing of the mind in terms of regaining the harmony of the mind as a trinity in justice is a healing of the vision of the eternal things. This latter healing is the subject of book 14.

At the end of book 13, after an extensive discussion of how Christ brings salvation to sinners, Augustine explicitly draws on the trinity in the mind as a result of faith, but he does so in a somewhat elaborate way. First, he draws on a case of someone memorizing the words of faith without understanding them:

> Suppose then someone commits merely the sounds of the words that express this faith to memory without knowing what they mean – as people who do not know Greek can know Greek words by heart, or Latin ones for that matter, or the words of any other language they are ignorant of; they have, do they not, a kind of trinity in their consciousness, because the sounds of those words are in his memory even when he is not thinking about them, and from them he forms his attention by recollection when he does think about them; and it is his will to recollect and think that joins the two together. But, when he does this, we said, he is certainly not acting according to a trinity of the inner man but rather one of the outer man, because all that he remembers and looks at when he wishes and as he wishes is something belonging to the sense of the body which we call hearing,

> nor by such thinking is he dealing with anything but the images of bodily things, namely of sounds. (13.26)

Then the next step is taken, where the things memorized are also understood:

> If, however, he holds in his memory and recollects the meaning of those words, he is now indeed doing something proper to the inner man, but he is not yet to be thought of, or talked of, as living according to the trinity of the inner man, unless he loves what these meanings proclaim, command and promise. He could, after all, remember and think about them because he reckons they are false and wants to try to refute them. So the will which, in this case, joins together what was contained in the memory and what has been imprinted therefrom on the thinking attention does indeed complete a trinity, being itself the third component; but one does not live according to it if one does not approve of what one thinks about as being false. (13.26)

And immediately following, the last step is taken:

> When, however, you believe it to be true, and love in it what should be loved, then you are already living according to the trinity of the inner man; every man lives according to what he loves. (13.26)

Why this tiresome arrival at something which seems quite obvious? It seems that it has to do with Augustine's insistence on the distinction between the outer and the inner man. Augustine wants to show that although faith in Christ is based on the outer man, because it is based on sense perception, it still leads to a transformation in the inner man, and thus the faith in Christ based on the outer man can rightly be said to be the basis of the restoration of the trinity in the inner man, although that trinity, because based on temporal things, cannot be said to be the image of God.

By way of summary of this introduction to book 13, we now see that the distinction between the outer and the inner man is not so much concerned with something that is external to the mind, but rather it concerns something in the inner man which is based on and dealing with external and temporal things. In our discussion of book 12, we have already seen that the discussion of the mind's functioning in connection with eternal and temporal things was quite similar and almost identical, so that for modern readers it is often hard to see why it matters so much to explain the distinction to such length. This, however, has certainly to do with Augustine's Platonic readers because, in Platonism, it is really hard to conceive of something external to the soul to enter into the soul and even determine the health of it. Therefore, Augustine takes great care to explain how the connection between the outer and the inner man is to be conceived.

When we look at the flow of book 13, we see the concern about the outer and the inner man already appear at the beginning of the argument. It appears when Augustine distinguishes between those things in John 1 that are a matter of contemplation – for example, the fact that the Word was with God and was God – and those which are perceived by the mind from the outside through the knowledge of external things. The transition is highlighted by such phrases as: 'This is already something that happened in time and belongs to the knowledge which is contained in awareness of history' (13.2). In what follows, Augustine shows himself to be constantly concerned with the locus of faith, whether it resides in the mind or is itself something external:

> What we are now obliged by the prescribed course of our plan to discuss at somewhat greater length in this book is faith, which gives the name of the faithful to those who have it and of the unfaithful, or unbelievers, to those who do not, like those people who did not receive the Son of God when he came into his own estates. And although *faith* comes to us *by hearing* (Rom 10:17), it does not belong to that sense of the body that is called hearing, because it is not a sound; (13.5)

6.3.1. Happiness

So far, we have dealt with the first side of the coin of book 13: the role of Christ in salvation and the way that this fits into the question of inner and outer. The second side of the coin is introduced from 13.6 onwards, where Augustine begins to push the anthropological side of his argument. The argument from books 8 to 11 reaches its culmination point in book 13, where Augustine will need to make a case for the credibility of his anthropology and account of sin in order to convince his readers that they need Christ to be redeemed from their miserable state. Augustine is now going to show this in terms of an analysis of what everyone wants: happiness. The material from books 8 to 11 reappears, but framed along the lines of an account of happiness.

The transition takes place when Augustine begins to investigate whether the faith that is present in different believers is the same. This has to do with Augustine's theological aim. Anthropologically, his aim is to show that every human being strives for the same sort of happiness, even though in practice and after the fall different people envision this happiness in strikingly different ways. Faith is then to be shown to be the way in which the original and ultimate happiness that human beings were created for can be regained. Thus, at the end of 13.5, Augustine suggests that the faith in believers is actually one and the same faith:

> But we talk about one and the same faith of believers in the same way as about one and the same will of people who will; they all want the same thing, but while his own will is evident to each, that of the other

> man is concealed from him though he wants the same thing, and even if he indicates his will by certain signs, it is believed rather than seen. But everyone who is aware of his own consciousness does not of course believe but clearly sees that this is his will. (13.5)

At the beginning of 13.6, the transition is made to the question of the will, preparing the reader for the thesis that all want happiness:

> There is indeed such a unanimity within the same living and reason-using nature, that while to be sure it is hidden from one man what another man wants, there are some wishes that all have which are known to every single individual. While each man is ignorant of what another man wants, in some matters he can know what all men want. (13.6)

Subsequently, Augustine elaborates on the joke of a comic actor, who told people that he knew what all people want. Having heard this announcement, many people came to his show. The comic actor told them: 'You want to buy cheap and to sell dear.' Augustine, however, denies that this is the case, since some people reject selling an item for an unreasonably high price because they think that what they are selling is not worth it. The same goes for the alternative offered by the poet Ennius, who holds that everyone wants to be praised. However, some do not want to be praised for something that they think is not praiseworthy. The apotheose comes at the end of 13.6:

> But if he had said 'you all want to be happy; you do not want to be unhappy,' he would have said something that no one at all could fail to recognize in his own will. Whatever else anyone may wish for secretly, he never forgoes this wish which is well known to all and in all. (13.6)

This designation of something that all people want, namely, to be happy, has its parallel in the fundamental anthropological analysis from books 8 to 10. Everyone finds their ultimate destiny in the love of God and of their neighbour as themselves. At this point, it is still only shown that all want to be happy, but at the highpoint of his argument (13.12), Augustine will try to show that ultimate happiness can only be found in perfect justice and everlasting life, which means: in God.

Now that what all people want has been fixed, it is time for the second level of the argument – the explanation of the consequences of the fall into sin. Of course, Augustine is well aware of some of the complications involved with his thesis that all want to be happy. It might be true that all long for happiness, but, still, people find it in strikingly different things:

> But the strange thing is, seeing that all men have one common will to obtain and retain happiness, where does the enormous variety and

> indeed contrariety of wishes about happiness come from – not that anyone does not want it, but that not everyone knows it? If everybody knew it, it would not be reckoned by some to consist in conscious virtue, by others in bodily pleasure, by others in both, by yet others in this, that and the other. (13.7)

This problem will bother Augustine for the rest of the first half of book 13, until the properly Christological part of the book. His argument involves two steps: *first*, Augustine establishes the connection between happiness and goodness. True happiness consists in having what one wills to have, but it also consists in willing good things rather than bad things. This step ends with the conclusion that faith is the right way towards reaching this state of happiness (13.10). Then, in the *second* step, Augustine attempts to show that true happiness can only be true happiness if eternal, and therefore, immortality is needed to fulfil the requirement of true happiness. This step ends with the conclusion that Christian faith is the true way to reach this state of happiness, and it provides the transition to the Christological part of book 13 (13.12).

Let me take a closer look at the *first step*. Augustine starts from his conclusion that everyone wants happiness, and he then questions how it is that different people find that happiness in different things. The fact that happiness is found in strikingly different things, suggests that not all people know where to find this happiness nor in what it consists. When wondering about these things, Augustine already touches on the relationship between happiness and goodness:

> Perhaps then it is untrue, what we have taken for absolutely true and certain, that all men want to live happily. If, for example, to live happily is to live a life of conscious virtue, how can a man who does not want this want to live happily? Would it not be truer to say: 'This man does not want to live happily because he does not want to live a life of virtue, which is the only way of living happily'? So all men do not want to live happily, indeed very few want to if the only way of doing so is to live a life of conscious virtue, which many people do not want. (13.7)

Notice how, following Augustine's favourite rhetorical strategy, the link between happiness and goodness is introduced here merely 'for the sake of the argument', although it will soon dominate the discussion and determine the main thrust of the argument in this book 13. Before this happens, however, a different option needs to be investigated. Perhaps happiness consists simply in an optimal amount of pleasure, so that everyone wills whatever pleases them most. Epicurus is brought in to defend this. Cicero is then brought in for the second time – he had already been cited in the context of the thesis that all will to be blessed – to reject this. This leads to

Augustine's general conclusion with regard to the question of whether all want to be happy:

> Therefore, since it is true that all men want to be happy, and yearn for this one thing with the most ardent love they are capable of, and yearn for other things simply for the sake of this one thing; and that no one can love something if he simply does not know what it is or what sort of thing it is, and that he cannot not know what it is that he knows he wants; it follows that all men know what the happy life is. All who are happy have what they want, though not all who have what they want are ipso facto happy; but those who do not have what they want, or have what they have no right to want, are ipso facto unhappy. Thus no one is happy but the man who has everything he wants, and wants nothing wrongly. (13.8)

In the end, Augustine is not interested in these questions for their own sake. This becomes evident when he goes on to discuss the question of why it is that people do seek happiness at whatever places, places of which they know – as he has just argued – that do not give them what they ultimately want: happiness reached by doing the good. The answer to this question comes in the typical form of another question:

> Perhaps it is just that humankind is so thoroughly warped; it does not escape them that neither someone who has not got what he wants nor someone who has got what he is wrong to want is happy, but only someone who both has the good things he wants and does not want any bad things; yet when it is not given them to have each of these two things which make up the happy life, they in fact choose the one which puts the happy life further out of reach than ever – because someone who gets what he wrongly desires is further away from the happy life than someone who does not get what he desires; when what they should rather choose and prefer is a good will, even without getting the things it wants. (13.9)

Augustine clearly argues here for the priority of goodness over happiness. To reach true happiness, one needs to choose the good over attaining short-term happiness. Otherwise, one will go astray, and, indeed, it is this reason that makes people enjoy those things which are not to be enjoyed.

Through this analysis, Augustine introduces a new interpretation of sin. So far, sin meant to value created things higher than God, and, thus, one fell from a position of seeing things rightly to a false view of God, one's neighbour and oneself. This led to a fundamental anxiety and to the creation of a wealth of images of external things in the mind attempting to master one's world on one's own rather than in dependence on God and the things themselves. In

this book 13, Augustine develops an account of sin that mirrors these previous insights, but takes them up in a new way. Sin, Augustine suggests here, is shortcut behaviour. One wants to reach happiness quicker than would be wise. Therefore, one puts one's happiness in all sorts of earthly things and in short-term pleasure – a refutation of Epicurus is added to the previous refutation of Platonism as pride – compromising the requirement of justice for reaching true happiness. You think that you will receive pleasure, but you forget that true pleasure consists in true happiness and that justice goes before happiness. Otherwise, ultimately, pleasure and short-term happiness will end in disappointment.

Allow me to take a short excursion into contemporary theology. Theologically, this raises all sorts of interesting questions. For Augustine, for example, an innerworldly spirituality is in the end sin because it is a longing for short-term happiness. This is very interesting from an environmental perspective. A true respect and care for our natural environment, for example, requires us to put our ultimate happiness in something beyond this world because, otherwise, we will turn the pleasure that we get from our natural environment into an ultimate aim, which leads to exploitation. This shows us that what has been traditionally said about Augustine's position does not necessarily follow, namely, that his Platonism along with its tendency towards dualism and contempt for the material world necessarily leads to an exploitation of creation.[3]

Now that the connection between happiness and goodness has been established, we have followed the argument full circle, since this is precisely what faith itself does. It is the source of good and makes us happy, because this faith comes from God, and makes us see God after this life, in perfect happiness:

> It is for this reason that the faith by which we believe in God is particularly necessary in this mortal life, so full of delusion and distress and uncertainty. God is the only source to be found of any good things, but especially of those which make a man good and those which will make him happy; only from him do they come into a man and attach themselves to a man. And only when a man who is faithful and good in these unhappy conditions passes from this life to the happy life, will there really and truly be what now cannot possibly be, namely that a man lives as he would. (13.10)

However, this is not all that the argument is about. Apart from showing the relevance and indeed aptitude of faith to the human condition, Augustine is also preparing for the Christological section which starts in 13.13. There,

[3] Cf. Scott A. Dunham, *The Trinity and Creation in Augustine: An Ecological Analysis* (SUNY Series on Religion and the Environment; Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2008).

Augustine will argue that Christ is the example of the just man par excellence, and it is this just man who lives blessedly by willing the good, and prefers the good over achieving happiness.

The double aim of the argument comes particularly to the fore when Augustine takes the *second step* towards the Christological section, the step in which he argues that everyone in search of happiness seeks happiness eternally, and, therefore, requires immortality. The argument has its context in an anti-Stoic argument. Augustine pursues two lines of argument here, the first one explicit, the second one merely implicit. The passage is introduced in this way:

> But now meanwhile the philosophers have all constructed their own happy lives as each has thought best, as though they could manage by their own virtue what they could not manage in their common condition of mortal men, namely to live as they would. *They felt indeed that there was no other way for anyone to be happy but by having what he wanted and not enduring anything he did not want.* Now who is there who would not want any kind of life that he enjoyed and thus called happy to be so in his own power that he could have it last forever? And yet who is there in such a position? (13.10; my emphasis)

Notice the sentence I italicized. It fulfils two functions. On the one hand, it introduces the link between pursuing happiness and suffering. On the other hand, it introduces the question of immortality. Before entering the question of immortality, Augustine includes a lengthy discussion of pursuing happiness and suffering – this quote follows on the previous one:

> Does anyone want to suffer troubles he would endure bravely, even though he wants to and can endure them if he suffers them? Does anyone want to live in torment, even though he is able to preserve his virtue in it by his patience, and so live laudably? Those who have endured such evils in their desire to have or their fear to lose what they loved, whether their motive was mean or praiseworthy, have thought that the evils would pass away. Many people have bravely fought their way to abiding good things through transitory evils. Such people are ipso facto happy in hope even in the midst of the transitory evils through which they come to the good things that shall not pass away. (13.10)

This goes on for some time. In the end, it leads to the basic conclusion that all who pursue true happiness need immortality, and will only find it in Christian faith. At the same time, however, Augustine is again preparing his readers for the description of Christ in this book 13, because what he describes here, suffering for the sake of a happiness to come, is what Christ does. Christ endures the true search for happiness in two respects: he does

the good rather than opting for short-term happiness, and he is ready to suffer on hope for a better future.

6.3.2. Grace

A final issue needs to be addressed at the end of this discussion of the first half of book 13: the issue of grace. In Chapter 4, I have already raised this question. In books 8–10, the question of grace remains in the background, and sometimes it even seems as if our natural access to and longing for God is so strong that we could return to God on our own. As we have quoted from the end of book 8, faith in Christ strengthens our knowledge and love of God, but *not* as something altogether unknown *and unloved*. We saw again in books 9 and 10 that there can be clouds between us and God through sin, and we can put images of God, our neighbours and ourselves within our minds so as to block our vision of God. Still, those who seek to know themselves are advised to remove those images and to see both themselves and God as they are.

The transition came in book 12, which was perhaps slightly prepared for in book 11. As we have shown in the previous section, Augustine suddenly reframed his account of the fall so as to suggest that access to God may be lost rather than merely damaged. This tendency is now continued in book 13, because the idea that everyone longs for happiness is now interpreted in such a way that people's ideas of what this ultimate happiness is can be totally different. Hints at this idea have been given in previous books, but there they remained very much in the background. In addition, the turn to faith in Christ is now repeatedly put in the context of grace and even of election. Augustine never thematizes this explicitly, and he often introduces the grace language via allusions to Scripture, but still, his interest is evident. We find it as early as 13.10 of which the beginning has already been quoted:

> It is for this reason that the faith by which we believe in God is particularly necessary in this mortal life, so full of delusion and distress and uncertainty. God is the only source to be found of any good things, but especially of those which make a man good and those which will make him happy; only from him do they come into a man and attach themselves to a man. (13.10)

It is stated only implicitly here, but still the good that makes one good comes from God and from God alone. It returns in 13.11, still implicitly:

> That man lives happily, as we have said above and established firmly enough, who lives as he wants and does not want anything wrongly. But no one is wrong to want immortality if human nature is capable

> of receiving it as God's gift; if it is not capable of it, then it is not capable of happiness either. (13.11)

And then finally in full force in 13.12, immediately at the beginning:

> Whether human nature is capable of something it confesses to be so desirable is no small question. But if the faith possessed by those to whom Jesus *gave the right to become sons of God* (Jn 1:12) is to hand, then there is no question at all. (13.12)

The language is that of the first chapter of the Gospel of John, which is extensively quoted at the beginning of book 13; however, the emphasis is now placed on the capacities in the face of evil, and the role of God in restoring these capabilities.

In the middle of book 13, references to grace and election merge with Christological language. In 13.13, Augustine summarizes the role of Christ in saving us from our misery in reply to the question of whether the death of Christ was the only way to save us. Augustine denies that it was the only way, but he suggests that it was the most suitable way:

> Nothing was more needed for raising our hopes and delivering the minds of mortals, disheartened by the very condition of mortality, from despairing of immortality, than a demonstration of how much value God put on us and how much he loved us. And what could be clearer and more wonderful evidence of this than that the Son of God, unchangeably good, remaining in himself what he was and receiving from us what he was not, electing to enter into partnership with our nature without detriment to his own, should first of all endure our ills without any ill deserts of his own; and then once we had been brought in this way to believe how much God loved us and to hope at last for what we had despaired of, should confer his gifts on us with a quite uncalled for generosity, without any good deserts of ours, indeed with our ill deserts our only preparation? (13.13)

Faith, works and grace are already touched upon here at the end of the quotation, and this language immediately continues once again in 13.14, which deals entirely with justification:

> For even what we call our deserts or merits are gifts of his. In order that faith might work through love, *the charity of God has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us* (Rom 5:5). And he was given to us when Jesus was glorified in his resurrection. It was then that he promised he would send him and that in fact he sent him, because it was then, as had been written and fore-

> told about him, that *he ascended on high, he took captivity captive, he gave gifts to men* (Ps 68:19; Eph 4:8). These gifts are merits by which we arrive at the supreme good of immortal happiness. (13.14)

In spite of all these references to the doctrine of grace and election, there is no explicit polemics with the Pelagians. Nor does Augustine give up on the idea of a natural access to God as the good good, nor does he give up his idea of knowing ourselves and longing for justice. In this respect, for Augustine, Christianity is no different from humanism, or in his time: Platonism. Human beings have a natural desire for the good, and who can long for something that he does not know? Through all the shortcuts to misguided ideals of happiness, people do all sorts of good things. The difference with humanism appears where one would suggest that one may reach ultimate happiness in one's own power. Our will needs to be healed, because it keeps making shortcuts, choosing power over justice. This healing of our illness is only possible through God's grace.

The coherence of his fundamental anthropology, doctrine of sin and soteriology turn Augustine's theology, at least here in *De Trinitate*, into a very flexible theology. Human beings are not totally bad. Paul's experience in Romans 7, where he finds in himself the intention to do the good, but finds that his flesh still does what is evil, is not *only* the believer's experience, but also that of the not yet believer. Grace does not introduce a fully new human being, overturning what we naturally are. *Gratia perficit naturam* is as true of Augustine as it is of Thomas Aquinas, although it means something different in both thinkers. On the other hand, as we have seen in Chapter 4, Augustine draws so much on the natural abilities of human beings that some interpreters tend to construe a natural route into the divine. Such a route can be construed because it is actually there, and it remains present after sin. Grace is not necessary because there is no natural access to God, but it is necessary because our natural abilities malfunction and need to be repaired. Everything is present that is necessary to find God, but we turn ourselves away from God all the time.

Here we see the meaning of that famous phrase 'God is nearer to me than I am to myself' (*conf*. 3.6.11), and other passages in the *Confessiones*, such as Augustine saying that God was within all the time, but he was outside. This is precisely the problem: we are alienated from ourselves through sin. This is the paradox of Augustine's soteriology, namely, that it states the necessity of grace for salvation on the one hand, while doing nothing other than appealing to our natural inclinations on the other. Although a paradox, to me this is the potential of Augustine's theology for contemporary theology. On the one hand, it enables one to make a constant appeal to those who do not accept the truth of the Christian message and to share with them a concern for the common good. On the other hand, it ensures that the Christian message does not fade away into general anthropological concerns or a general hope for a better

future. A clear eye for the good present in all of us is possible and necessary, but a plain optimism about our capability of realizing our own salvation is precluded.

6.4. Book 14: The Structure of Wisdom

In a way book 14 is the highpoint of the second half of *De Trinitate*. If there is something of an 'ascent' in this part of the work, it culminates here rather than in the last book. Here, the true *imago Dei* is found after a long intellectual search for it. At the same time, in terms of the argument, book 14 adds little that is new. Augustine takes up the leading themes from books 10 to 13, repeats them to a considerable extent, and leads them to their ultimate result, the *visio Dei*. That it adds little that is new should not surprise us. Various bits and pieces from the earlier books have been developed into a coherent argument, but still a very complicated one. As we have sketched in Chapter 4, Augustine developed an argument at four different levels, and all of these levels come together in an attempt to convince the reader of the existence of an image of the Trinity in human beings and in an attempt to show that this image can only be restored and perfected through faith in Christ. Thus, it is no surprise that the book where the highpoint of the argument is reached consists mainly of a collection of the bits and pieces that were developed, to bring them into a coherent whole that convinces the reader of the overall line of the argument.

At the same time, this means that, in our scholarly interpretation of Augustine's argument, book 14 does not provide so much of an argument on its own, apart from the fact that it is this book that will clarify what the *imago Trinitatis* is. What we will do, therefore, is draw attention to a few distinct aspects of this book, rather than follow the argument in this book step by step. I will discuss four themes: First, the core issue: the notion of an image of the Trinity in the mind. Second, the theme of Augustine's appeal to philosophy and his emphasis on the theme of justice. Third, I will deal with the role of Christ in the restoration of the image and, finally, I will address again the issue of grace. Of course, even when taking this approach, we will see many issues pass by that have already been addressed in my interpretation, but we will see how book 14 contributes to them and how it integrates the threads that have been developed before.

6.4.1. The *Imago Dei*

I will start with the main distinct feature of this book, the designation of the true *imago Dei* in human beings. In Chapter 4, I have already argued that for me, book 14 is the key to the question of the *imago Dei* rather than book 10, as certain scholars tend to suggest. One sees this confirmed in books 12

and 13, where Augustine keeps pointing forward to the true *imago Dei* emphasizing that what he discusses is still not the true image of the Trinity. As we have seen above, the certainty of self-knowledge was not as such a trinity. The trinity of memory, understanding and will seemed to be a real trinity. At the end of book 10, Augustine asked himself whether he would try to jump immediately from the introduction of this trinity to the way in which it is an image of the Trinity, or whether he would rather 'explain things a bit further' in terms of a trinity in connection with perception, which we saw him do in book 11. The reason for this was what Augustine developed in terms of the distinction between *scientia* and *sapientia*. The true *imago Dei* is a form of *sapientia* because it needs to be concerned with eternal and immutable things, which is God alone. It can only be regained, however, by the reintegration of the mind through the *scientia* of Christ the Mediator, and, therefore, in this fallen world, *scientia* needs to precede *sapientia* and thus, the true image of God in human beings.

We had to wait until book 14 before Augustine would come back to this concept of the true image of God in memory, understanding and will. After a long attempt in book 14, taking up many elements from the argument in book 10, Augustine introduces in 14.11 the trinity of memory, understanding and will as the *imago Dei*:

> But now we have come to the point of discussing the chief capacity of the human mind, with which it knows God or can know him, and we have undertaken to consider it in order to discover in it the image of God. For although the human mind is not of the same nature as God, still the image of that nature than which no nature is better is to be sought and found in that part of us than which our nature also has nothing better. But first of all the mind must be considered in itself, and God's image discovered in it before it participates in him. For we have said that even when it has lost its participation in him it still remains the image of God, even though worn out and distorted. It is his image insofar as it is capable of him and can participate in him; indeed it cannot achieve so great a good except by being his image. Here we are then with the mind remembering itself, understanding itself, loving itself. If we see this we see a trinity, not yet God of course, but already the image of God. (14.11)

We encounter a number of themes here, one of which we will return to later in this section. That theme is the theme of participation in God and various aspects of it. We find it here and we will return to the second part of this quotation below. The other theme which concerns us now is the question of the permanence and dynamics of the image of God, an image which is intrinsic to the mind on the one hand, but which can be worn out and distorted on the other. In my mind, the key to an adequate understanding of this static and

dynamic aspect of the image is Augustine's emphasis on the modal character of the image. The nature of the image is not that it remembers, understands and loves itself or even that it remembers, understands and loves, but it is the *capability* to do so. This capability remains, although the actuality of this remembering, understanding and loving God varies.

After rejecting various options of construing the image of God in transitory things in the human mind, Augustine states this clearly. In 14.15, as we have already quoted in Chapter 4, the *imago Trinitatis* is almost 'defined' as the capability of human beings to remember, understand and love God:

> This trinity of the mind is not really the image of God because the mind remembers and understands and loves itself, but because it is also able to remember and understand and love him by whom it was made. And when it does this it becomes wise. If it does not do it, then even though it remembers and understands and loves itself, it is foolish. (14.15)

In this quotation, we see again the dynamic character of the image of the Trinity in human beings. The image is always there in the sense that the capability remains even if it is not actualized, but it is only actualized and perfected when God is loved above all and when one's neighbour is loved as oneself. We have seen the web of connections between the various notions that make up this notion of the image of God being developed since book 8. Human beings find their ultimate destination and nature in the love of God and one's neighbour as oneself. Once they turn away from this love, the image of the Trinity that is engrafted in them becomes defective, although it is never lost entirely. In books 11–13, a route is then sketched through which human beings can return, because their defect can be healed through faith in Christ. Faith in Christ purifies the soul from sin, and through this process of purification, which continues until the believer dies, the image of the Trinity as one's love of God above all is repaired, so that the wisdom of the soul is perfected in justice, knowledge and holiness.

6.4.2. Justice and Philosophy

A second theme running through book 14 is the theme of justice. We have already touched on this theme a number of times. I have emphasized its soteriological aspects in Chapter 3, when speaking about Augustine's Christology. Salvation is about becoming just, both in terms of what we would now call 'forensic' justification and justification in the sense of 'being made just', or, as Protestants tend to call it: sanctification. In Chapter 4, when speaking about Augustine's anthropology, we encountered the theme of justice once again, in connection with goodness. God is present to fallen human beings in terms of access to the principles of goodness, and their ability to appreciate the just human being as their ideal of what it is to be human.

It is remarkable that in book 14 the theme of justice is closely linked to explicit dialogues with secular thinkers. The first time that this happens is in the beginning of the book, where Augustine plays with the term 'philosophy', referring to Pythagoras as the one who introduced the term. Augustine gets close to the philosophers by emphasizing that they did not call themselves wise men, but rather lovers of wisdom, and then he suggests a reason why they did so:

> Or possibly the reason why none of these men dared to profess to be wise was that they thought a wise man would be entirely without sin. But our scriptures do not say this, because they say, *Rebuke a wise man and he will love you* (Prv 9:8); and presumably they judge a man who is considered to be worthy of rebuke to have sin. Even so, I for one do not dare to profess to be wise. It is enough for me that it is also the business of the philosopher, that is of the wisdom-lover, to discuss wisdom, which even these old philosophers cannot deny. After all, they did not stop doing this, even though they professed to be lovers of wisdom rather than wise men. (14.2)

Augustine prepares his semi-pagan readers for the necessary role of Christ in bringing about salvation by utilizing the distinction between a wise human being and a lover of wisdom. He brings in Scripture to show that true wisdom is not so much freedom from sin, but the willingness to be corrected, which presupposes that the wise are not without sin. And if philosophers are not without sin, they cannot do without Christ either.

The theme of justice is introduced for a second time in connection with pagan philosophy when Augustine asks whether the virtues will last into eternity. At first sight, it is not immediately clear why Augustine raises the question of the eternality of the virtues in 14.12. At that point, he has already introduced the trinity of memory, understanding and will (14.8), and Augustine has also already turned from the trinity in the perception of external things, which he has developed in book 11, to the trinity in the mind. When remembering things, taking them from memory to understanding, linked to one another by the will, there is no longer something material in the mind that might render it unfit for being an image of God. Still, as Augustine argues in 14.11 it is an image that does not belong to our nature. Rather, it is something accidental that is added. Therefore, if we have faith in Christ, there is a trinity of remembering and understanding that one believes and the will binds these two together in a steadfast act of faith. However, this trinity is still temporary because it is transformed into sight and into the vision of God after death.

At that point, Augustine introduces the question of whether the virtues will last forever, and whether, if we remain steadfast in remembering, understanding and willing them through faith, they might be the basis for an

everlasting trinity in the mind, and thus be a fitting basis for the *imago Dei*. Augustine introduces the question like this:

> The virtues too, by which one lives well in this mortal state, begin to be in the consciousness, which was already there without them and was still consciousness; but whether they too cease to be when they have brought you to eternity is quite a question. Some people think they will come to an end, and when this is said about three of them, sagacity, courage, and moderation, there does seem to be a point there. Justice however is immortal, and will rather then be perfected in us than cease to be. (14.12)

This quotation is followed by Augustine's quote from Cicero (called Tullius here) in the famous dialogue *Hortensius*, which played such a major role in Augustine's search for wisdom. Cicero denies the need for virtue in eternity because if there is no lack there is also no need for virtue. Augustine's reply is very subtle, hardly explicitly denying the truth of Tullius' argument:

> Thus this great orator, reflecting on what he had learnt from the philosophers and explaining it with such grace and distinction, sang the praises of philosophy; and in doing so he stated that the four virtues are necessary only in this life, which we observe to be full of trials and errors; and that none of them is necessary when we move on from this life, if we are allowed to live where one can live happily; but that good souls are happy with awareness and knowledge, that is to say, with the contemplation of nature, in which nothing is better or more to be loved than the nature which created and established all other natures. But if being subject to this nature is what justice means, then justice is quite simply immortal, and will not cease to be in that state of happiness but will be such that it could not be greater or more perfect. (14.12)

We see the subtle shift. Living a blessed life is a life of contemplation of the highest nature. This nature, however, is not something that the blessed mind is part of, or enjoys by default, but it is God, and being blessed consists in submitting oneself perfectly to that highest nature.

The connection between justice and pagan philosophy appears for a final time at the end of book 14. Augustine finishes the book with an extensive quote from the end of Cicero's *Hortensius*. At the end of the *Hortensius*, Cicero sketches two avenues for the end of the search for wisdom that the philosopher pursues. Either there is no life after death, and death is as it were a rest after life, or the old philosophers have it right, and we have eternal and divine souls, which can reach heaven through a process of purification.

Perhaps even more remarkable than the cited quote is Augustine's response to it. Here, at the end of book 14, he attacks for the last time the promise of a pagan search for wisdom. First, he criticizes Cicero for giving too much credit to the fashionable sceptic philosophy of the time, denying life after death:

> What astonishes me about a man of such genius is that he should promise men living in philosophy, which makes them happy by contemplation of the truth, a cheerful sunset to their days when they have completed their human tasks, 'if this capacity of ours to perceive and to be wise is perishable and fleeting'; as though something here were dying and falling to pieces that we did not love but rather hated savagely, seeing that its sunset makes us cheerful. He certainly did not learn this from the philosophers whose praises he sings so enthusiastically; this opinion smacks of that new Academy in which he was persuaded to doubt even the most evident things. (14.26)

Subsequently, he pursues Cicero's second option, that of the Platonic philosophers:

> But from the philosophers, as he himself admits, and they the greatest and far and away the most brilliant, he had learnt that souls are eternal. It is quite reasonable that eternal minds should be stirred by his exhortation to be found in their course when they come to the end of this life, that is in reason and in eager inquiry, and should mix themselves up less in the tangled vices and errors of men, to make their return to God all the easier. (14.26)

When comparing Augustine's response and Cicero's quote, a subtle difference can be seen in that Augustine leaves out the idea of the divinity of the soul, which Cicero mentions. Cicero's *aeternos animos ac divinos* is only *aeternos* in Augustine. Similarly and by consequence of the former, Augustine reads the eternity of the soul as immortal, that is: without end, rather than without a beginning. The theme of justice appears in terms of the philosophical ideal of staying away from the vices and errors of men and of the easy return to God.

The real break, then, between the apologetic appeal to a purified Cicero, comes at the very end of the book:

> But this course, which is set in the love of and inquiry into truth, is not enough for unhappy men, that is for all mortals who have this reason alone without any faith in the mediator. This point I have tried to demonstrate as best I could in the previous books, especially in the fourth and thirteenth. (14.26)

In a way, this discussion of Cicero provides a summary to the whole of Augustine's argument in *De Trinitate*, especially its second half. Augustine drew constantly on the Platonic search for wisdom, for a divine 'spark' in human beings, but tried to convince his Platonically oriented readers that the true way to reach wisdom resides in a conversion to Christianity. In order to bring them to this step, which is by no means a small step, since Augustine implies that there is a humiliation implied in it, he tries to make the transition as smooth as possible. As we have seen, this always is Augustine's approach to his pagan readers. Augustine moves back and forth between hiding and emphasizing the differences between a pagan worldview and Christianity, between selling seemingly pagan ideas in Christianized form and outward anti-pagan criticism.

6.4.3. Participation

A third crucial theme in book 14 is the theme of participation. More than elsewhere in *De Trinitate*, Augustine uses participation language to describe the relationship between God and the believer. A significant passage for the way in which Augustine uses the concept is 14.11, quoted more extensively above, where Augustine has announced his search for the *imago Dei* in the highest part of the mind, which is directed towards the contemplation of God. The mind, however, should be the image of God even when it turns to something lower through sin, and therefore, Augustine suggests seeking for the image of God while abstaining from the mind's contemplation of God. The concept of participation plays a key role in this passage:

> But first of all the mind must be considered in itself, and God's image discovered in it before it *participates* in him. For we have said that even when it has lost its *participation* in him it still remains the image of God, even though worn out and distorted. It is his image insofar as it is capable of him and can *participate* in him; indeed it cannot achieve so great a good except by being his image. (14.11; my emphasis)

What we see is that Augustine uses the concept of participation for the perfected state of the mind, and not for the 'default' state of a human being through creation. A human being's participation in God is seen in the fact that this human being becomes alike to God in justice and holiness, and he or she becomes, therefore, immortal.

The concept of participation as the perfection of the image of God in the believer rather than an ontological sharing in the divine nature is confirmed immediately after the definition of the image of God as the capability to remember, understand and love God:

> Let it then remember its God to whose image it was made, and understand and love him. To put it in a word, let it worship the uncreated

> God, by whom it was created with a capacity for him and able to share [*particeps potest*] in him. (14.15)

When Augustine speaks of partaking of God as a result of the perfection of the image of God, rather than as an ontological fact, he uses participation language, which implies a distinct deviation from Platonism, because the mind's remembering, understanding and loving itself as the image of God is not as such a participation in God. This confirms Augustine's consistent critique of Platonism when it comes to the divinity of the soul, and it reinforces his attempt to convince his Platonic readers that only faith in Christ will make them partakers of God, rather than the mere fact of their existence. Hence, Augustine stresses again that the wisdom through which we worship God is not itself divine: 'I do not mean it is God's wisdom in the sense of the wisdom by which he is wise; he is not wise by sharing in himself, as the mind is by sharing in God' (14.15).

We see the subtle shift from the Platonic framework again in 14.16, where Augustine develops the hierarchical order between God, the mind and its direction to and participation in God again:

> So there is an uncreated nature which created all natures great and small, and is without any doubt more excellent than these natures it has created, more excellent therefore than this rational and intellectual nature we are talking about, which is the mind of man made to the image of him who made it. This nature more excellent than others is God. (14.16)

This emphasizes the distinction between God and the mind as God's image. However, pursuing the language of Scripture, Augustine goes on immediately:

> And indeed *He is not set far away from us*, as the apostle says, adding: *for in him we live and move and are* (Acts 17:27). If he had meant this in terms of our bodies, it could have been understood of the bodily world also; in it too we live and move and are, as far as our bodies are concerned. So we really ought to take his words in terms of the mind which was made to God's image; this is a more excellent way, being intelligible instead of merely visible. What, after all, is not in God, of whom it is divinely written, *for from him and through him and in him are all things* (Rom 11:36)? So of course if all things are in him, what can things that live live in and things that move move in but in him in whom they are? (14.16)

This suggests that there is a participatory connection between God and the mind that lives 'in him'. Yet, from what we have seen above, this quotation can certainly not be interpreted as if people have their existence in God in

such a way as to imply any modern idea of ontological participation in God. Partaking in God, for Augustine, is preserved for the pure of heart, and, therefore, has its place in the eschaton, as a metaphor for the vision of God and of one's immortal state of bliss, perfection and, thus, similarity to God. We see this confirmed in what follows, when Augustine nuances his claim of our existence in God:

> And yet not all are with him in the way meant when the psalmist says to him, *I am always with you* (Ps 73:23), nor is he with all men in the way meant when we say 'The Lord be with you.' It is a human being's great misfortune not to be with him without whom he cannot be. Obviously he is not without him in whom he is; and yet if he fails to remember and understand and love him, he is not with him. But of course if someone has totally forgotten anything, he cannot even be reminded of it. (14.16)

Even when taking into account the fact that Augustine reserves the concept of participation in God only for soteriology, and thus restricts it to the eschaton and to the elect, what we see in this quotation is a certain ambiguity between affirming that we have our existence in God on the one hand, and restricting this participation on the other. One would say that if we have our existence in God, not only in salvation, but also in our creaturely existence, we cannot fall out of it, and, thus, should be able to return to God by virtue of our creaturely existence, because we never lose our access to God entirely, but this, it turns out, is not necessarily the case for Augustine, because it would make the Church, grace and Christ superfluous, and such a route into God is thus utterly undesirable to him.

6.4.4. Grace Again

This brings us to the question of grace. In the previous section on book 13, we have already dealt with the question of grace. We saw a development from books 8 to 10, where Augustine was unclear mostly in regard to the question of whether fallen human beings are capable of returning to God on their own, and books 12 and 13, especially in the middle of book 13, where Augustine begins to use the language of grace and election. At the beginning of the current section, I have said that book 14 brings as it were the argument from 8 to 13 together, building to its culmination point. Interestingly, we indeed see that with regard to the question of grace book 14 shares in the ambiguity of the previous books. On the one hand, we find hints of an optimistic anthropology in this book along with hints of a pessimistic one, together with explicit grace language.

This fact as such is already instructive because it is related to the question of the chronological order of the books in *De Trinitate*. If book 14 had been consistently and unambiguously anti-Pelagian, one might propose the thesis that

books 12 to 14 (and 15, as we will see below) were written during a later stage of the Pelagian controversy, so that Augustine became more precise and more sensitive to his use of grace language.[4] This, however, is not the case. It is very likely that books 14 and 15 were written at the very end of the process of the composition of *De Trinitate*. A hint pointing to this conclusion is the fact that Augustine refers far more to the earlier books in these two than anywhere else in the work. However, his grace language exemplifies the same ambiguity as we see in the earlier books.

It is even highly likely in certain cases that Augustine was aware of the problem and, most probably, that he construed it intentionally. This is especially the case in 14.20 and 14.21. Book 14.20 suggests a Pelagian escape, whereas grace language is nowhere more prominent than in 14.21.

But before we have a look at those two key sections, let us follow the route from 14.16 up to that point. In these sections, Augustine has been sketching the two options of cleaving to God and perfecting the image of God in the mind, on the one hand, and turning away from God and thereby damaging the image, without loosing it altogether, on the other. We have seen a hint of this already at the end of our discussion on participation, where Augustine remarked: 'Obviously he is not without him in whom he is; and yet if he fails to remember and understand and love him, he is not with him. But of course if someone has totally forgotten anything, he cannot even be reminded of it' (14.16). The last sentence of this quotation highlights the ambiguity of the grace language. What is meant, so it seems, is that something of the image of God remains even among those who do not remember, understand and love God because, otherwise, they could not 'remember' God at all. At the same time, the remark plays a confusing role, since it was thrown into the discourse as a one-liner, at the end of a section, and was hardly integrated into the discourse's flow. We have seen this before in the question of whether or not the memory of God has been entirely forgotten as a result of the fall. On the one hand, Augustine is eager to suggest that it has not, but on the other hand, he seems to have an interest in disquieting his readers with the suggestion that one may completely forget it if one does not eagerly care about an immediate return to God.

In 14.17, however, we see the initial interpretation confirmed. Indeed, God cannot be entirely forgotten, but one still needs to be reminded of God. The sort of character this remembrance has is not specified for the moment. After quoting Psalm 9, where it is said that all the nations forgot about God, Augustine remarks:

> So these nations had not so forgotten God that they could not even remember when reminded of him. By forgetting God it was as if they had forgotten their own life, and so they turned back to death, that is

[4] Cf., for an overview of the views concerning the composition of the work as a whole: Kany, *Augustins Trinitätsdenken,* 31–46.

> to hell. Then they are reminded of him and turn back to the Lord, which is like their coming to life again by remembering the life they had forgotten. (14.17)

This is typical of Augustine's view of the consequences of the fall. In a way, everything that one would need to have at one's disposal in order to return to God remains present. God remains present in memory, so that one might return if one wished; however, it is exactly this wish that is lost, although it is not even that, but the wish moves in the wrong direction. Augustine sketches something of the subtlety of this in the next section, when he deals with the proper love of oneself:

> So the man who knows how to love himself loves God; and the man who does not love God, even though he loves himself, which is innate in him by nature, can still be said quite reasonably to hate himself when he does what is against his own interest, and stalks himself as if he were his own enemy. It is indeed a dreadful derangement that while everyone wants to do himself good, many people do nothing but what is absolutely destructive of themselves. (14.18)

The will to do the good is there. Everyone wants to be happy and they want the good for themselves, but having lost an eye for what this good is – although, as we have seen, the insight into what this good is has been retained at the same time – they seek for it in the wrong place. A bit further in 14.18, Augustine elaborates on this: '[I]t [namely, the mind, MW] became weak and dark, with the result that it was miserably dragged down from itself to things that are not what it is and are lower than itself by loves that it cannot master and confusions it can see no way out of' (14.18).

In 14.19, Augustine reaffirms that in spite of this fall towards delusions from which they see no way to return, human beings still keep remembering themselves, understanding themselves and loving themselves. Subsequently, Augustine arrives at the point where the tension between a natural ability to turn to God and the impossibility to do it is at its strongest point: 14.20 versus 14.21. The key passage from 14.20 is this:

> And it could not love itself if it did not know itself at all, that is if it did not remember and understand itself. There is such potency in this image of God in it that it is capable of cleaving to him whose image it is. It is so arranged in the order of natures – not an order of place – that there is nothing above it except him. And then when it totally cleaves to him it will be one spirit, as the apostle testifies when he says, *Whoever cleaves to the Lord is one spirit* (1 Cor 6:17). This will come about with the mind attaining to a share of his nature, truth, and happiness, not with him growing in his own nature, truth, and happiness. So when it blissfully cleaves to that nature, it will see as unchangeable in it everything that it sees. (14.20)

Augustine starts from the image of God that always remains because human beings cannot stop remembering, understanding and loving themselves. This image is of such a power (*tam potens est*), he continues, that it is able to cleave (*valeat inhaerere*) to God whose image it is. This power, if used to cleave to God, will lead to the unity between God and the soul. Here, if read in isolation from the rest of the argument, one would presume that even after the fall, where the power of the mind to remember, understand and love oneself as the image of God is not lost, the human mind has the ability to ascend into God and partake in God's nature on its own.

However, things change in 14.21, where Augustine starts from the fact that the soul is not yet united to the immutable God:

> For the time being, however, when it sees itself it does not see anything unchangeable. Of this it can have no doubt, since it is unhappy and longs to be happy, and its only hope that this will be possible lies in its being changeable. If it were not changeable it could no more switch from unhappy to happy than from happy to unhappy. And what could have made it unhappy under its omnipotent and good Lord, but its own sin and its Lord's justice? (14.21)

Notice how Augustine includes an ironic play on the notion of changeability. In Platonism, the soul is divine and remains changeless within the changing body. Augustine ironically remarks now how fortunate it is that the soul is not divine and, therefore, changeable, since if this were not so salvation would not have been possible at all. Subsequently, Augustine explicitly introduces grace language:

> And what will make it happy but its own merit and its Lord's reward? But even its merit is the grace of him whose reward will be its happiness. It cannot give itself the justice which it lost and no longer has. It received it when man was created and it lost it of course by sinning. So it also receives the justice by which it can merit happiness. (14.21)

It is highly significant to see what Augustine says is lost by sin. What is lost is not the image of God, nor the knowledge of the good, on the basis of which even fallen humans can distinguish between good and bad things, at least not completely, but the righteousness required to be able to see God and be blessed. It is this righteousness that is given back to the sinner through grace. Grace is necessary, although, as Augustine continues, grace is also necessary to be aware that it is necessary:

> But when the mind truly recalls its Lord after receiving his Spirit, it perceives quite simply – for it learns this by a wholly intimate instruction from within – that it cannot rise except by his gracious

> doing, and that it could not have fallen except by its own willful undoing. (14.21)

Subsequently, Augustine deals more explicitly with what has been lost through sin, namely, one's blessedness, and what has been retained after the fall, even when it can be obscured – God:

> Certainly it does not remember its happiness. That was once, and is no more, and the mind has totally forgotten it and therefore cannot even be reminded of it. But it believes the trustworthy documents of its God about it, written by his prophets, when they tell about the bliss of paradise and make known through a historical tradition man's first good and first evil. The mind does however remember its God. He always is; it is not the case that he was and is not, or is and was not, but just as he never will not be, so he never was not. And he is all of him everywhere, and therefore the mind lives and moves and is in him, and for this reason is able to remember him. Not that it remembers him because it knew him in Adam, or anywhere else before the life of this body, or when it was first made in order to be inserted into this body. It does not remember any of these things at all; whichever of these may be the case, it has been erased by oblivion. Yet it is reminded to turn to the Lord, as though to the light by which it went on being touched in some fashion even when it turned away from him. (14.21)

It is interesting to see how even here Augustine is not completely clear about the relationship between 'nature' and 'grace'. The blessedness is lost and one needs to rely on Scripture in order to know about it. Those who believe receive the knowledge of their own blessedness through grace. But what then, should we think about what follows? Does the mind (*mens*, see the first sentence of 14.20), which is the constant subject of these sentences, remember the Lord its God by nature or by grace? That it *remembers*, means that it has not entirely lost this ability. But *that* it remembers and not remains forgotten seems to be the result of grace. Still, notice how Augustine returns here to a classic expression of natural theology: Acts 17, as the basis for the claim that we always know God in some way, although we cannot use this knowledge of God to return on our own.

The natural theology, the extent to which even the godless know God and act accordingly, is explained further in terms of access indeed to God as the good good and standard of morality:

> It is in virtue of this light that even the godless can think about eternity, and rightly praise and blame many elements in the behavior of men. And by what standards, I ask you, do they judge, if not by ones in which they see how a man ought to live, even though they do not live

> like that themselves? Where do they see these standards? . . . Where indeed are they written but in the book of that light which is called truth, from which every just law is copied, and transferred into the heart of the man who does justice, not by locomotion but by a kind of impression, rather like the seal which both passes into the wax and does not leave the signet ring? (14.21)

In this quotation, we see clearly a point that we have made in Chapter 4, where we argued that Augustine's eternal ideas are not so much blueprints or ideal forms of everything that exists, as they are in Platonism, but they function as the norms for good and evil. In Platonism, opposing these two functions of the eternal ideas would be false because it is in the ideal forms that one sees both how things are and what should be done. In Augustine, the participatory ontology through which what something is, it is in the One, is broken, so that the good is no longer the same as the truth, as we have argued in the previous chapter.

Summarizing what we have seen in book 14 concerning the language of grace, we can say that the knowledge of God remains after the fall, but it cannot be operationalized after sin. One needs to be 'reminded' of God, which means one has not forgotten entirely about God. This remembering of God is the result of grace, although Augustine is not always equally unambiguous about that point. Grace, then, is needed to return to God, since we lost the righteousness required to see God face to face.

6.5. Book 15: Seeking His Face Ever More

Finally, we have arrived at the last book of Augustine's *opus laboriosum*. Book 15 is by far the longest of all the books. This makes for tiresome reading because it is not always clear where Augustine's text is heading. On the one hand, it has a clear target, namely, the vision of the Trinity that is God 'itself'. On the other hand, the book is something of a summary and a discussion of loose ends without having a clear argument of its own.

Book 15 is also remarkable because content-wise, it is something of a disappointment. I have argued above that Augustine's argument is carefully crafted. Even the enormous rhetorical complexity of his argument in the second half has not gotten out of hand. The author knows why new subjects are introduced, how and when they are introduced and what role they fulfil in the text. The enormous level of complexity developed within the argument leads the reader to expect an apotheosis at the end that surpasses all that went before. This does not happen. The message of book 15 is that as long as we remain here on earth we continue to seek.

Before we begin a close reading of a number of passages, it is good to have an initial overview of what Augustine develops in this book. The book begins

with the theme of searching for the Trinity (15.1–3). Can we reach what we have been looking for, and, if not, why go on seeking? After that, Augustine summarizes his argument to this point (15.4–5). What follows thereafter is a sequence of what I will call 'waves', attempts to reach an understanding of the Trinity that all fail. I will distinguish three of these waves below. Subsequently, we will find an extensive essay on the Holy Spirit (15.27–38). In a final round of reflections, Augustine pursues the differences between the image and the Trinity itself (15.39–50).

This summary is misleading, however, because in the meantime, all sorts of issues pass by which throw additional light on various aspects of the overall argument. One of the most important issues is the qualification of the image of God in human beings, and the extent to which this image truly resembles God. In book 15, more than elsewhere, Augustine emphasizes the dissimilarities between the image and that which is represented. Another crucial issue is the ultimate destiny of human beings in the eschaton and what will happen in the afterlife, because this qualifies the participation language that Augustine used in books 4, 13 and 14.

6.5.1. Disappointment

We start the discussion of book 15 with its aim and the disappointing result. Of course, Augustine does not intend to disappoint his readers from the very beginning. Instead, he urges them to strive for an intellectual understanding of God even more than they previously had, but still, he hints already at the result in the introductory sections 15.1–3:

> If we then go on to look for something above this nature, and look for something true, there is God, a nature namely that is not created but creator. Whether this nature is a trinity we ought to demonstrate, not merely to faith on the authority of divine scripture, but also to understanding, if we can, by some evidence of reason. Why I say 'if we can' will appear well enough as our investigation of the subject proceeds. (15.1)

The 'if we can' (*si possumus*) is the hint leading towards disappointment. However, the hint is much more explicitly stated in the next paragraph:

> The God himself we are looking for will help us, I confidently hope, to get some fruit from our labors and to understand the meaning of the text in the holy psalm, *Let the heart of those who seek the Lord rejoice; seek the Lord and be strengthened; seek his face always* (Ps 105:3). Now it would seem that what is always being sought is never being found, and in that case how is the heart of the seekers to rejoice and not rather grow sad, if they cannot find what they are looking for? (15.2)

Here we see a famous quote from Psalm 105: 'Seek his face evermore'. Augustine quotes it various times in *De Trinitate*, for example, in the final prayer. Yes indeed. How should one rejoice in the disappointment of not being able to find God? The answer comes only a few sentences later:

> That is indeed how incomprehensible things have to be searched for, in case the man who has been able to find out how incomprehensible what he is looking for is should reckon that he has found nothing. Why then look for something when you have comprehended the incomprehensibility of what you are looking for, if not because you should not give up the search as long as you are making progress in your inquiry into things incomprehensible, and because you become better and better by looking for so great a good which is both sought in order to be found and found in order to be sought? It is sought in order to be found all the more delightfully, and it is found in order to be sought all the more avidly. (15.2)

In the light of our overall interpretation of the second part of *De Trinitate*, it is significant to note that the purpose of the search is not the actual vision itself. Rather, it is the improvement of the seeker's moral qualities, who becomes 'better and better'. Indirectly, such an improvement of the seeker is still a preparation for the *visio Dei*, because for Augustine, as we have already seen a number of times, the *visio Dei* is only possible for the pure of heart.

6.5.2. Three Waves

Skipping the summary of the content of the work, we arrive at section 15.6, where the purpose of this final book is mentioned once again: 'Now therefore let us look for the Trinity which is God in these eternal things, incorporeal and unchangeable, since the happy life which is nothing if not eternal is promised to us in the contemplation of them' (15.6). The flow of the argument after the summary – specifically from 15.6 onwards – could be characterized as a series of waves. Waves of hope are followed by moments of disappointment. Each time Augustine tries a different way of penetrating the mystery of the Trinity and each time he comes to the conclusion that he has failed. Eventually Augustine gives up after a long essay on the Holy Spirit. After this essay, he merely emphasizes the failures of any strict parallel between the Trinity and the created order.

This does *not* mean, however, that Augustine does away with the preceding argument. The disappointment is intentional. Through the waves of attempts to see the Trinity already here in this earthly life, Augustine develops lines of argumentation that we have already seen in earlier books. We called it the 'bypass' in this chapter and we called it the dynamic character of the image of the Trinity in Chapter 4. The image in human beings is stable

in the sense of being a power to love God above all else and to love one's neighbour as oneself. Sin, however, leads to the image's imperfection and defect, so that it needs repair. This repair is to be found through faith in Christ. In fact, Augustine is aware of the impossibility of seeing God in this life from the very beginning. He merely uses the idea of seeing God to push his readers towards embracing Christ as the way that leads to the ultimate vision of God. In the end, Augustine's argument is directed towards the moral transformation of the reader, bringing the image of God to perfection in justice and holiness.

The ultimate attempt is the topic of investigation: seeing God with one's natural eyes. This again highlights something about the readers Augustine is addressing. As we have argued in Chapter 1, Augustine's primary readers are those on the borderline of Christianity, and these are strongly interested in arguments based on what we would now anachronistically call 'natural reason'. That these readers are convinced of a hierarchical ordering of the universe becomes clear from what follows on the previous quote:

> It is not, after all, only the authority of the divine books which asserts that God is; the universal nature of things which surrounds us, to which we too belong, proclaims that it has a most excellent founder, who has given us a mind and natural reason by which to see that living beings are to be preferred to non-living, ones endowed with sense to non-sentient ones, intelligent ones to non-intelligent, immortal ones to mortal, powerful to powerless ones, just to unjust, beautiful to ugly, good to bad, things that cannot decay to things that can, changeless to changeable things, invisible to visible, non-bodily to bodily, happy to unhappy. (15.6)

This sounds perfectly satisfying to Platonically oriented readers. It touches on the notion of an ascent, although as we have argued before, Augustine transforms the hierarchical structure of Platonic ontology to make it fit into his Christian frame of reference. This quote is followed by an elaborate investigation into the nature of God that starts as follows:

> And so, since we rank the creator without a shadow of doubt above created things, we have to admit that he supremely lives, and senses and understands all things, and cannot die, decay or change; and that he is not a body but the most powerful, just and beautiful, the best and happiest spirit of all. (15.6)

The intention of this first wave in a series of attempts to see God with our natural eyes is to reduce the 'attributes' of God to a Trinity. First Augustine reduces the many attributes to three, and subsequently he reduces the three to one. This last step is natural because, as we have seen in Chapter 2, the

problem is that the 'attributes' just mentioned apply to the Trinity as a whole and to specific persons, as Augustine has defended at length in books 5–7. The question is then: 'If then all these things can be said both about the Trinity itself and each person in it, where or how will a trinity be disclosed? (*apparebit*)' (15.7). What Augustine is doing here has much of an *irrealis* because earlier on he explicitly argued that the persons of the Trinity do not coincide with those things predicated of God in the sense of absolute simplicity. Of all the things we can say about God, these things are not accidental attributes of God's essence, but they are the essence itself, as Augustine emphasizes several times here in this book. This, however, does not apply to the Persons of the Trinity. Therefore, it is quite hopeless to look for a Trinity in those things that are predicated of God. Still, Augustine continues with this experiment until the end of 15.8, where he eventually reduces God's 'attributes' to three: eternity, wisdom and happiness. In 15.9, he eventually and not surprisingly repeats his argument from books 5 to 7 arguing that these three attributes apply to all Trinitarian persons and to the essence of God. Book 15.9 ends with the lament:

> So how then are we going to understand this wisdom, which God is, to be a trinity? I did not say 'How are we going to believe?' Among the believers this should be no problem. But if there is some way in which we can see intellectually what we believe, what might this way be? (15.9)

In 15.10, it is eventually affirmed that the search has failed: 'So here we are, after exercising our understanding as much as was necessary, and perhaps more than was necessary in these lower things, wishing and not being able to raise ourselves to a sight of that supreme Trinity who is God' (15.10).

A new wave rolls into the scene. Augustine links the conclusion of the first wave, the idea of God as wisdom, with a trinity that he has developed in book 9: *mens, notitia sui, amor/dilectio*:

> Why then should we not recognize a trinity there? Could it be that this other wisdom which is called God does not understand itself, does not love itself? Who would ever say such a thing? It would be folly and impiety to say or believe such a thing. So there we have a trinity, namely wisdom and its knowledge of itself and its love of itself. We found a similar trinity in a human being, namely the mind, and the knowledge it knows itself with, and the love it loves itself with. (15.10)

This wave too, however, is quickly broken. Augustine notes three respects in which the image does not do justice to that of which it is to be an image. First, the image of God in human beings is *in* them, but human beings are not this image themselves, which is the case with the Trinity. The Trinity is not in God, nor are the persons in the Trinity members of a substrate named

'God', as Augustine has already argued in book 7. Second, Augustine explicitly rejects the idea of a parallel between the image of *memoria, intelligentia* and *voluntas* in the mind on the one hand, and Father, Son, and Spirit on the other. Augustine repeats his argument from book 7, where he argued extensively that the Trinitarian persons do not derive their essential 'attributes' from one another. The Father does not remember things through the Son, but remembers all things through himself, and likewise with the Son and the Spirit. Otherwise, subordinationism would follow. Finally, Augustine further deconstructs the parallel between the Trinity and the image of God in the mind by pointing to the problem of time. We remember things from the past and know them in the present, whereas in God, there is no past, present and future.

This wave is closed with a typical breath of negative theology:

> But the more we desire to observe closely how they happen, the more our language begins to stagger, and our attention fails to persevere until our understanding if not our tongue can arrive at some clear result. And shall we suppose that with such feebleness of mental capacity we can comprehend how God's foresight is the same as his memory and his understanding, and how he does not observe things by thinking of them one by one, but embraces everything that he knows in one eternal, unchangeable, and inexpressible vision? It is a relief in this kind of difficulty and frustration to cry out to the living God: *Your knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is mighty and I cannot attain it* (Ps 139:6). From myself indeed I understand how wonderful and incomprehensible is your knowledge with which you have made me, seeing that I am not even able to comprehend myself whom you have made; and yet *a fire burns up in my meditation* (Ps 39:3), causing me to seek your face always. (15.13)

Here Psalm 105.4, 'I seek your face always', is mentioned again. It marks the force underlying the waves. Seeking, but not finding, and in finding seeking even more.

We arrive at the third and in a sense final wave, introduced this time from a beloved exegetical *topos*, Paul's remark about seeing now through a mirror in an enigma. Augustine links this comment up with another text from Corinthians, 2 Cor. 3.18: 'But we with face unveiled, looking at the glory of the Lord in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory as by the Spirit of the Lord.' Through a meandering style of reasoning, Augustine connects these two passages to give the search for the image of God in human beings a soteriological aim. The aim of the discourse about the image of the Trinity in human beings is not so much to develop a conceptual parallel between God and the mind, as it is intended to set human beings in motion to get their minds transformed so that they become worthy

of the vision of God in the eschaton. At this point, we see reappearing all of the components of the argument from books 12 to 14. A bypass is needed to transform the image of God in us, and this bypass is faith in Christ as the mediator between God and human beings. In order to construe this emphasis on the role of Christ, Augustine returns to a theme from book 9, the discussion of the inner and the outer word.

By the way earlier on we pointed to the arbitrary and pragmatic way in which Augustine uses his notion of an image or traces of the Trinity in the created order. He suggests the idea of an image a number of times, postpones the real image then until book 14 and is considerably imprecise with regard to the precise parallel between the image and of what it is an image. This is perhaps more evident in book 15 than elsewhere. Augustine does not seek for a conceptual or ontological parallel between the concept of the Trinity and the concept of the mind. What we have called the fourth level in Chapter 4, that of the image language, is used to reinforce the third level, which deals with the key role of Christ in restoring the image of God.

This is also evident here. Augustine develops the idea of an inner word that is perfectly equal to the wisdom of God if it is true, but still is not as timeless as the wisdom who God is, into a parallel of the perfect equality of Father and Son. Once more, he adds a parallel between the way in which our inner word becomes an outer spoken word on the one hand, and the incarnation on the other:

> Thus the word which makes a sound outside is the sign of the word which lights up inside, and it is this latter that primarily deserves the name of 'word.' For the one that is uttered by the mouth of flesh is really the sound of a 'word,' and it is called 'word' too because of the one which assumes it in order to be manifested outwardly. Thus in a certain fashion our word becomes a bodily sound by assuming that in which it is manifested to the senses of men, just as the Word of God became flesh by assuming that in which it too could be manifested to the senses of men. And just as our word becomes sound without being changed into sound, so the Word of God became flesh, but it is unthinkable that it should have been changed into flesh. It is by assuming it, not by being consumed into it, that both our word becomes sound and that Word became flesh. (15.20)

However, the idea of a word that corresponds to God's will and is only a true word and image of God provides him with the opportunity to speak about salvation in Christ and the transformation of the image of God in us. In book 9, we already saw the dynamic character of the image of God as the inner and the outer word, the word conceived (*verbum conceptum*) and the word born (*verbum natum*). If the word conceived and the word born

correspond, the image is perfect, and if not, it stands in need of salvation. Here we see the same logic being followed:

> There is also this other likeness to the Word of God in this likeness which is our word, that we can have a word which is not followed by a work, but we cannot have a work which is not preceded by a word, just as the Word of God could be, even without any creation coming into existence, but there could not be any creation except through that Word through which all things were made. And the reason why it was not God the Father, not the Holy Spirit, not the trinity itself, but only the Son who is the Word of God that became flesh (although it was the trinity that accomplished this), is that we might live rightly by our word following and imitating his example; that is, by our having no falsehood either in the contemplation or in the operation of our word. (15.20)

This ultimate picture, however, is not for us now in the present because people still lie in thoughts and deed. The perfected image of God in us is eschatological:

> However, this is a perfection of the image that lies some time in the future. To achieve it we are instructed by the good master in Christian faith and godly doctrine, in order that *with face unveiled* from the veil of the law *which is the shadow of things to come* (Heb 10:1; Col 2:17), *looking at the glory of the Lord through a mirror, we might be transformed into the same image from glory to glory, as by the Spirit of the Lord* (2 Cor 3:13) according to our earlier discussion of these words. (15.20)

This wave too, comes to an end. Having reached the high point of a real similarity between the word spoken by us and the Word that became flesh, although this similarity is eschatological, Augustine falls back on dissimilarity, and he adds that the dissimilarity is so strong that it cannot be adequately expressed. First, Augustine points to the dissimilarity of knowledge. Here, he returns to the argument against the sceptics that he developed in book 10, arguing that there are certain things that we know for certain. The dissimilarity is that there are only a very small number of things that we know with certainty. This is not the case with God, because in God, there is no discursive knowledge:

> But did God the Father, from whom is born the Word as God from God, did God the Father then, in that wisdom which he is for himself, learn some things through the senses of his body, others through himself? Would anyone dream of saying this who is able to think of God not as a rational animal but as above the rational soul, as far of course

> as he can be thought about by those who rate him above all animals and all souls, even though they see him only by inference through a mirror and in a puzzle, and not yet face to face as he is? (15.22)

After pointing to the uncertainty of human knowledge, Augustine draws attention once again to the difference between our word conceived and our word born. We can lie, we can err and finally, our word is never an eternal word such as the Word of God is eternal. Ultimately, Augustine claims that God does not even think, given that the concept of thought presupposes change, and change belongs to the created order but not to God.

The waves of which we have spoken are interrupted by a substantial essay on the Holy Spirit. Thematically this essay does not completely fit into the wave structure found in the preceding part of the chapter. We will deal with the essay in a minute. After the part on the Holy Spirit, Augustine again summarizes what he sought, the Trinity in its image in the created order, but from then on he merely emphasizes the dissimilarity between what he found and the Trinity itself. Insofar as he still continues to deal with the theme of dissimilarity, he stresses again that memory, understanding and will should not be seen as parallel to Father, Son and Spirit and that the one person in which the human trinity is found should not be thought of as being equal to the persons in the Trinity.

6.5.3. On the Holy Spirit

From 15.27 to 15.39, 12 sections long, Augustine speaks about the Holy Spirit. This is remarkable. It is as if Augustine feels that he has said too little about the Holy Spirit in the previous books, and here he tries to compensate for this lack. Only in book 5 did Augustine show any specific attention to the Spirit. The essay in book 15 can be divided into two major parts: the first part focuses on the Holy Spirit as love, and the second part discusses the Holy Spirit as gift. These two discussions, both of which deal extensively with scriptural material, are surrounded by remarks concerning the soteriological significance of the Holy Spirit.

In the case of the discussion on the Holy Spirit as love this significance is intimately related to the question of grace because Augustine claims that the love that is poured out into our hearts towards God and neighbour is not merely a gift of the Holy Spirit but the Holy Spirit itself, so that, in and through love, God the Holy Spirit dwells in us and we dwell in him. This is not entirely new, although the emphasis on the fact that God the Trinity is in us through the Spirit is rather new. Earlier in book 8, Augustine already used the quotation from the first Epistle of John that 'God is love' to make a rather direct inference from the love between human beings to the being of God as love:

> Let no one say 'I don't know what to love.' Let him love his brother, and love that love; after all, he knows the love he loves with better

> than the brother he loves. There now, he can already have God better known to him than his brother, certainly better known because more present, better known because more inward to him, better known because more sure. Embrace love which is God, and embrace God with love. (8.12)

In book 15, Augustine is now making the same point, although a bit more explicitly, and probably for the purpose of supporting his doctrine of grace, something that seems much less evident of book 8, as we have seen in Chapter 4. Not only is God love, but true love is also God:

> Nor are we going to say that God is called charity because charity is a substance that is worthy of the name of God, but simply because it is God's gift, rather as it is said to God, *you are my patience* (Ps 71:5). This of course is not said because our patience is God's substance, but because it comes to us from him; as in fact it says elsewhere, *For from him comes my patience* (Ps 62:5). Scripture's way of talking, indeed, easily refutes such an interpretation. You are my patience is the same sort of statement as *Lord my hope* (Ps 71:5), and *My God my mercy* (Ps 59:17), and many others like that. But in this case it does not say 'Lord my charity,' or 'You are my charity,' or 'God my charity,' but it says *God is charity* (1 Jn 4:8,16) just as it says *God is spirit* (Jn 4:24). Anyone who does not see this should ask the Lord for understanding, not me for an explanation; I could not put it any more plainly. (15.27)

The issue of grace seems to be the main reason for identifying our love of God and neighbour so strongly with the presence of the Spirit and, in the Spirit, the Trinity as a whole. As we have already seen in this chapter, books 13 and 14 show the increasing importance of grace language within the argumentation, and Augustine is now quite unambiguous when it comes to the origin of true love and the possibility of doing the good:

> So it is God the Holy Spirit proceeding from God who fires man to the love of God and neighbor when he has been given to him, and he himself is love. Man has no capacity to love God except from God. That is why he says a little later, *Let us love because he first loved us* (1 Jn 4:19). The apostle Paul also says, *The love of God has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us* (Rom 5:5). (15.31)

The next section begins in the same vain:

> Nothing is more excellent than this gift [i.e. love, MW] of God. This alone is what distinguishes between the sons of the eternal kingdom

> and the sons of eternal perdition. Other endowments too are given through the Spirit, but without charity they are of no use. Unless therefore the Holy Spirit is imparted to someone to make him a lover of God and neighbor, he cannot transfer from the left hand to the right. (15.32)

The first part of the essay also has another emphasis. When Augustine speaks about the indwelling of God in the believer as the love that is in our hearts for God and our neighbours, he repeatedly stresses that it is not only the Spirit who dwells in us but the Trinity as a whole (*tota trinitas*). Similarly, when Augustine asks what it means to say that God is love, and whether it is only the Spirit who is love or whether the Father and the Son can also be called love, he stresses that all three persons are love, but that it is appropriate, nevertheless, to speak of the Holy Spirit as love because he is given to us as the love through which we love God and our neighbours. It seems that he is concerned over functionalizing the one person of the Spirit over against the others, and, therefore, emphasizes the full equality of the persons and their unity of action in the world.

The discussion of the notion of grace merges into the discussion of the Holy Spirit as 'Gift' (*donum*):

> So the love which is from God and is God is distinctively the Holy Spirit; through him the charity of God is poured out in our hearts, and through it the whole Trinity dwells in us. This is the reason why it is most apposite that the Holy Spirit, while being God, should also be called the gift of God. And this gift, surely, is distinctively to be understood as being the charity which brings us through to God, without which no other gift of God at all can bring us through to God. (15.32)

What follows is an extensive discussion of all sorts of passages from Scripture where the Spirit is called Gift. One wonders why Augustine brings in so many proofs from Scripture for the use of 'Gift' as a name for the Holy Spirit. Primarily, this is again the question of grace, because 'Gift' as something that comes from God might suggest that God's grace is not the immediate divine activity itself but a gift or activity that remains different from God, and thus it would not be Godself who acts in believers. In this context, Augustine stresses that Gift-language in Scripture does not imply that the gift is not the Holy Spirit itself.

However, another reason might also stand in the background. It is not the first time that Augustine discusses the idea of the Spirit as gift, namely, in 6.11, and in this earlier discussion Augustine was more or less already on dangerous grounds. After having extensively argued for the equality of the three Trinitarian persons in book 6, Augustine seems to need to reconcile his

argument with the terminology of a forerunner of undisputable authority: Hilary of Poitiers. Let me quote again from book 6.11:

> Someone who wished to put in a nutshell the special properties of each of the persons in the trinity wrote: '*Eternity in the Father, form in the image, use in the gift*.' (Hilary, De Trinitate 2, 1). He was a man of no small authority in the interpretation of the scriptures and the defense of the faith – it was Hilary who wrote this in his book on the subject. So I have examined as best I could the hidden meaning of these words, that is of 'Father' and 'image' and 'gift,' 'eternity' and 'form' and 'use'; (6.11)

Hilary's language is, as we have argued in section 2.3, rather functionalized language. As we have also seen, functionalization is not Augustine's preferred way of speaking about the Trinity, to say the least. This is evident from the way in which Augustine deals with the quotation from Hilary. It is clearly not discussed as something that fits well into Augustine's argument; rather, it is brought in as something that fits badly but is widely known and recognized by many readers as being authoritative, and thus it needs to be reconciled with Augustine's own non-functionalizing view. As we have seen in Chapter 2, in the remainder of the section in book 6, Augustine uses Hilary's language to make his own point, namely, that Father, Son and Spirit are equal.

In book 15, we see the discussion of the 'Gift-language' return. Here, even more than in book 6, Augustine seems to be eager to keep the Gift-language entirely scriptural. He keeps its meaning as closely as possible to the concept of the Spirit as giver of love, and he proves at length that in that sense the Spirit is indeed 'Gift'. This may very well be the reason why Augustine makes a polemical remark concerning the relationship between the 'Gift' and the 'Spirit' at the end of a long series of references to Gift-language in Scripture:

> Insofar as people do now see that the Holy Spirit is called the gift of God, they must realize of course that when they hear the phrase 'the gift of the Holy Spirit' they are to recognize the same figure of speech as in the phrase 'in the stripping of the body of flesh.' Just as the body of flesh is nothing but flesh, so the gift of the Holy Spirit is nothing but the Holy Spirit. (15.36)

What follows is indeed a repetition of the emphasis on the full equality of Father, Son and Spirit, something that Hilary's more functionalizing language seems to put at risk:

> So he is the gift of God insofar as he is given to those he is given to. But in himself he is God even if he is not given to anyone, because he was God, co-eternal with the Father and the Son, even before he was given

> to anyone. Nor is he less than they because they give and he is given. He is given as God's gift in such a way that as God he also gives himself. (15.36)

Apart from what one could see as a critique of Hilary's functionalized language, at the end of the essay another explicit conversation partner is suddenly introduced (15.38). This time it is Eunomius. His idea of the Son as born from an act of will of the Father is quickly dismissed as a position that the reader can know is absurd, and the point is again repeated that, like the Son is the Wisdom of the Father in the sense of appropriation, the Spirit is the love between Father and Son in an appropriated sense.

6.5.4. True Humanity as Eschatological Destiny

The final theme that I want to draw attention to in book 15 is the way in which Augustine describes the ultimate soteriological destiny of human beings. The first time that Augustine clearly touches on the nature of ultimate salvation is in book 15, at the end of the discussion on the Son, at the end of 15.26. At this point, Augustine stresses the dissimilarity between the Son as the Word of God on the one hand, and of our spoken word that proceeds from our mind on the other. He has developed the parallel and closes the discussion with the dissimilarity. In this context, he brings up the question of our likeness to God in the eschaton. Just as it was in book 14, the key quotation from Scripture is from the First Epistle of John 3.8:

> And so since there is now such a great unlikeness to God and the Word of God in this puzzle, though at the same time a genuine likeness has also been discovered there, we must admit further that even when we are like him, when we shall see him as he is – that not even then shall we be equal to him in nature. The nature that has been made is always less than the one that made it. (15.26)

Even when the image of God in us renders us similar to God, we will not be God, or more precisely of God's nature. The ontological distinction between God and human beings is retained. In what follows, Augustine gives us some hints concerning the relationship between our human nature as it now is, and as it will be eschatologically:

> Then, to be sure, our word will never be false because we shall neither lie nor be deceived. Perhaps too our thoughts will no longer chop and change, going and coming from some things to others, but we shall see all our knowledge in one simultaneous glance. And yet even when this happens, if it does happen, it will be a creature that was once formable which is formed, so that it now lacks nothing of the form to which it

> was intended it should come; but even so it will not be right or possible to put it on the same level as that simplicity in which there is not something formable that has been formed or reformed, but just form. Neither formless nor formed is that eternal and unchangeable substance. (15.26)

The ultimate purpose of salvation, as we clearly see here, is not a transformation of our nature into something we are not but the perfection of our human nature as we now have it. Ultimate justice and thus true humanity is the purpose of salvation, not its transformation into God. We see the same idea expressed in the last major part of book 15, where Augustine stresses the dissimilarities between the image of God in human beings and the Trinity who is God:

> And even when the time comes that they [i.e. memory, understanding and will, MW] are equal to each other, cured of all weakness, even then it will not be possible to equate with a thing unchangeable by nature a thing that is freed from change by grace, because creature is not to be equated with creator; and in any case, when it is cured of all weakness it will change. (15.43)

We encounter the same picture drawn towards the end of *De Trinitate*, but now in a more lively manner, in what is probably the most concise and beautiful description of the eschatological ideal of Christianity in the work as a whole:

> As for those who belong to him, though they may be far less intelligent and talented than these people, the jealous powers who slew the Lamb though he owed no debt of sin, and whom he overcame by the justice of his blood before doing so by the might of his power, have no rights over them to hold them in bondage, once they are released from the body at the end of this life. Thus freed from the power of the devil, they are taken up by the holy angels, delivered by *the mediator between God and human beings, the man Christ Jesus* (1 Tm 2:5). . . . Cleansed from all infection of corruption, they are established in tranquil abodes until they get their bodies back – but incorruptible bodies now, which will be their guerdon, not their burden. For it is the decree of the most wise and excellent creator that the spirit of the human being who is devoutly subject to God would have his own body blissfully subject to himself, and that this bliss should continue without end. (15.44)

We see here Christ's role as mediator and remover of all evils, the justificator so to speak, which was a leading notion in books 4 and 13. Along with this is an anti-intellectual twist criticizing the Platonic tradition for its emphasis

on salvation as the result of one's intellectual powers. This pride will lead nowhere because of our sin. Faith is needed to be healed from sin, and this faith is available for those who lack great intellectual powers as it is for those who have them. Also interesting is the role of the body, which is removed at the moment of death but received back again on the last day, as the same body purified and perfected. At the end of *De Trinitate*, we find an interesting return of the anthropological order that Augustine developed in the second half. Human beings' proper place and ultimate happiness is under God, loving God above all, and loving their neighbours as themselves. This does not change, not even in the eschaton.

6.6. Rough Edges

We have now come to the end of the discussion of Augustine's *De Trinitate*. Before we ask what Augustine might have to say on the level of soteriology in contemporary theology, it might be good to ask the question of rough edges in *De Trinitate*.

Throughout my interpretation of Augustine's work, I have made an attempt to make Augustine's argument as strong as possible. This is also prompted of course by the intention to develop Augustine's argument into an alternative to prevailing ways of doing theology today. Such an intention always has the disadvantage of not being very open to criticisms of Augustine's work. In fact, for a systematic theologian, my reading of Augustine is more of a thinking along the lines of rather than a critical assessment of Augustine's theology.

Still, along the long way of reading through Augustine's *opus laboriosum*, we have collected what one might call 'rough edges'. These rough edges are often already visible in the secondary literature. Areas where scholars strongly disagree are often areas where Augustine's thinking shows certain rough edges. These rough edges need not be hard inconsistencies, or incoherences, but they are certainly areas where Augustine's thought might be further developed, or places where certain questions might call for further elaboration.

Interestingly, I see rough edges in every chapter except for the first. In Chapter 2, on the Trinity proper, one of the rough edges is Augustine's use of *origo*-language. Pursuing Augustine's line of argument, we have shown that Augustine practically destroys the logic of origin in the Trinity because of his emphasis on the equality of the divine persons. On the other hand, as we have also shown, Augustine occasionally mentions *origo*-language. These two strands in his argument seem to live side by side without being explicitly resolved. If one focuses on the systematic evaluation of this ambiguity, I would say that Augustine retains the *origo*-language for the sake of what we now call 'backwards compatibility' and not so much because he needs it in his theology. The main direction of his thought runs against *origo*-language,

and he in fact defunctionalizes it rather explicitly in book 5, while mentioning it elsewhere to remain compatible with the tradition.

A second rough edge can be found in Chapter 3. I have made a plea for a moral Christology in Augustine. I believe that it is evident from the rest of this book that this plea was not merely motivated by Christological aspects of Augustine's work. Throughout this book, I have attempted to show how the *adagium* 'Blessed are the pure of heart' plays a key role in Augustine's theology. Returning to God, getting to know God, seeing God is all intimately connected with the believer's sense of inner justice. Thus, the key to understanding Augustine's Christology is not the typically modern interest in the Church as the body of Christ, or the transition from our human nature to Christ's human nature, be it mediated or not by the sacraments, but it is our inner restoration through justification and forgiveness of sins. How these are mediated, be it through Church membership, the administration of the sacraments or by other means, is in fact not a ruling question, at least not in *De Trinitate*, which is significant.

However, as we have seen in the discussion of contemporary literature, this is not all that must be said. Although I firmly maintain my thesis that modern scholarship has far too strong an emphasis on an ontological mediation Christology in Augustine, bypassing the moral aspects which I consider to be dominant, I am well aware of the warrant my opponents find in the texts. I have mentioned the use of the Athanasian phrase for deification, as it appears in books 4 and 13, as a shortcut Christology, because at these places Augustine seems to ignore our moral restoration through a direct reference to our sharing in the nature of Christ. The question would be, of course, whether Augustine needs this shortcut language systematically. I tend to say that he does not. He probably needs it rhetorically, to pull his semi-pagan readers towards Christianity.

Of course, it is the rough edges in Augustine's theology that often gives it the distinct flavour that it has: the richness and fluidity that so many readers still appreciate. This goes as well for all the rough edges discussed in this section. Therefore, to say that Augustine does not need the shortcut Christology for his own argument does not mean that he would have done better without it. The elevation aspects of Augustine's theology belong to its appeal to many readers and represent a strand of thinking that is deeply rooted in the New Testament and in the Christian tradition.

A third rough edge can be found in Chapter 4. In that chapter, we have discussed recent interpretations of Augustine's distinction between *notitia sui* and *cogitatio sui* and we have seen that the relationship between these notions is not completely clear. Knowledge of oneself is always present but not always active, so seemingly the distinction runs. This distinction is combined, however, with the designation of the *imago Trinitatis* as memory, understanding and will. Remembering, understanding and loving oneself is also always present, but these are seemingly intentional acts rather than a

mere fact of the identity of the knowledge of oneself with oneself. In book 11, then, remembering, understanding and the act of the will which connects the two is called *cogitatio*, whereas in book 15, in Augustine's own summary of book 10, *cogitatio* is distinguished from the trinity of remembering, understanding and loving oneself. The latter is the image of God because it always remains, whereas the second belongs to the perfection of the image, which does not always remain in the same state. To say the least, Augustine's analysis is not completely perspicuous at this point. This has consequences for the rough edges in Augustine's use of grace language because the precise nature of what remains forever in human nature is unclear, and it is also not entirely clear what its power might be.

Needless to say, in the case of the fundamental anthropological structure of human beings no less than elsewhere, Augustine has his reasons for not being completely clear about the nature of human beings. At the fundamental anthropological level, Augustine's primary aim was to make an appeal to his readers so that they would long for that which they had lost through sin. Thus, the anthropological structure had to attract the reader's attention, even to the extent of being recognizable as that which characterizes all human beings. An all too optimistic picture, however, would make the explanation of the effects of sin and the possibility of a restoration through faith in Christ superfluous, and this is the reason why Augustine's rhetorics remains of two minds concerning the fundamental structure of human beings.

A fourth rough edge is the use of participation language. As we have seen in this chapter, there is participation language in Augustine. I will deal more extensively with the concept of deification in Augustine below, but what is clear so far is that at certain moments Augustine seems to say that we have our existence in God, quoting Acts 17, for example, and at other moments he denies the idea that we participate in God through creation and reserves the concept of participation in God only for the eschatological vision of God.

The final rough edge, I would say, is also found in the present chapter: the question of grace. We have dealt with the ambiguity of grace language repeatedly in this chapter. On the one hand, Augustine firmly maintains that the image of God in human beings is retained even after sin. He also maintains that our access to the good remains after sin, and thus, the knowledge of God is never entirely lost, nor is our longing for the vision of God. What is lost, however, is our righteousness that is required to be able to see God and thus, to know the Truth face to face. Still, although we know God to a certain extent through our knowledge of the good, this knowledge of God is not operationalizable without the grace that liberates us and brings us to faith in Christ.

I have already asked if this is not an inconsistent position? I think that this is not necessarily so: however, the precise implications of various aspects of the problem certainly remain a bit blurred in Augustine's text. Once more, it is at least remarkable in the reception of Augustine's theology over the

centuries, that we see a strong tendency to separate the two strands of his theology: the Roman Catholic tradition seems to follow the optimistic strand of our access to the good and our desire to do it, whereas the Protestant strand emphasizes the pessimistic strand of the necessity of grace. Both receptions of Augustine's theology of grace seem regrettable to me because as we have seen in our analysis of the second half of *De Trinitate*, the argumentative power of Augustine's theology consists in holding these two strands together.

A final remark concerning the rough edges in Augustine's theology is in place, namely, concerning the status of coherence and consistency in Augustine's thinking. Augustine does not have the same interest in coherence and consistency in the same way as do modern scholars. The primary purpose of his argument in *De Trinitate* is to convince semi-pagan readers of the truth and indispensability of faith in Christ. To reach that goal, rhetorics is more important than consistency and coherence.

In addition, Augustine's theology is different from a modern one in the sense that it deals differently with its authoritative sources.[5] We have seen repeatedly, in the discussion of gender, for example, how Augustine invests much energy into reconciling systematic-theological implications of certain biblical texts with one another. Augustine's Bible is infallible and one of the key purposes of his theology is to weave a web between different aspects and parts of the biblical message in such a way as to develop it into a meaningful whole. In this weaving of a web, Augustine's context and his own view of Scripture does not allow for an explicit canon within the canon, although in fact he works with one. As a result, in many cases, biblical texts that do not completely fit into the main line of his theology are incorporated in a more or less loose way.

This is only one side of the coin, however. At the same time, Augustine is certainly interested in coherence and consistency. A mere interest in the success of rhetorics would move the Christian rhetor in the direction of the scepticism of the academics, a scepticism that Augustine is at pains to resist. Faith seeks understanding and part of this search for understanding is a search for coherence and consistency. Still, as we have seen, both remain only partially fulfilled. This is consistent with the basic underlying intuition of Augustine's theology. Augustine is not in search of a system that represents God in a perfect way. He is in search of the vision of God, and he is fully aware of the fact that all that comes before that vision stands under the provision of human frailty.

[5] Here I agree to a certain extent with Ayres in the last chapter of *Nicea and Its Legacy*, where Ayres emphasizes the differences between modern systematic theology and early Christian theology: Ayres, *Nicaea and Its Legacy: An Approach to Fourth-Century Trinitarian Theology*, chapter 16.

6.7. Deification in Contemporary Theology and Augustine

As I have shown in previous chapters, contemporary systematic theology shows a strong interest in a metaphysics of participation when it comes to conceptualizing the relationship between God and the world. In soteriology, this interest has its corollary in the popularity of the concept of deification or *theosis*.[6] Bruce McCormack rightly mentions it as one of the leading issues in contemporary systematic theology.[7] If it is God who encompasses our existence in an all embracing unity in diversity, our salvation cannot be anything but our return to that original identity in God or the realization of our awareness of the fact that this unity has been there all the time, or has been realized in Christ, depending on what sort of Trinitarian ontology we accept.

Deification or theosis is perhaps *the* hype of twenty-first-century theology. Whereas modern theology long viewed deification as a residue of the hellenization of Christianity and as typical of the Eastern Orthodox tradition, it now seems as if a concept of deification can be attributed to whatever respectable thinker in the Western Christian tradition. Apart from Augustine, the concept has been recently traced in Aquinas,[8] Luther,[9] Calvin and many others. Where the interest in Luther can be said to have stemmed from an ecumenical interest in Lutheran–Eastern Orthodox dialogue,[10] this can no longer be said of more recent studies. It can be safely said that there is a genuine interest now in the West in deification as our ultimate destination. We have our existence ultimately *in* God.

An interesting question is, of course: what feeds this interest? The resurgence of this interest cannot be described without taking the role of Eastern Orthodoxy into account. Eastern Orthodoxy played a key role in the

[6] I will use both terms interchangeably. A good overview of recent developments and a critical discussion of them, can be found in Paul Gavrilyuk, 'The Retrieval of Deification: How a Once-Despised Archaism Became an Ecumenical Desideratum', *Modern Theology* 25:4 (2009), 647–659. Other introductory articles appeared in evangelical circles, for example, Roger E. Olson, 'Deification in Contemporary Theology', *Theology Today* 64:2 (2007), 186–200, and Robert V. Rakestraw, 'Becoming Like God: An Evangelical Doctrine of Theosis', *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 40:2 (1997), 257–269.

[7] Bruce McCormack, 'Participation in God, Yes, Deification, No: Two Modern Protestant Responses to an Ancient Question', in Dalferth et al., *Denkwürdiges Geheimnis*, 347.

[8] A. N. Williams, *The Ground of Union: Deification in Aquinas and Palamas* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

[9] Tuomo Mannermaa, 'Theosis as a Subject of Finnish Luther Research', *Pro Ecclesia* 4:1 (1995), 37–47; Carl E. Braaten, 'The Finnish Breakthrough in Luther Research', *Pro Ecclesia* 5:2 (1996), 141–143.

[10] Cf. Anna Briskina, 'An Orthodox View of Finnish Luther Research', *Lutheran Quarterly* 22:1 (2008), 16–39.

twentieth-century ecumenical movement, and as a consequence, Eastern Orthodox theological concerns and liturgical practises were increasingly taken up in Western theological reflection. Apart from the role of Eastern Orthodox theologians in the ecumenical movement, and especially in connection with the theme of deification, individual Eastern Orthodox theologians who have worked within Western institutions have also been very influential. In this connection, the names of Vladimir Lossky and John D. Zizioulas come to mind. Lossky introduced Eastern Orthodox theology to Western readers as early as the 1950s.[11]

It seems to me that it is not without reason that these theologians have become so influential. Having moved to Western universities, they did not merely do theology from an Eastern Orthodox perspective, but having been trained at Western institutes and teaching there, they brought East and West into conversation. Thus, one could say, both East and West underwent a transformation within the conversation, both in the sense that the differences between the two strands of theology were emphasized, but also in the sense that these theologians made Western thinkers aware of elements in their theology that may be operationalized for the purpose of overcoming problems in Western theology.

This is not to suggest that Lossky and Zizioulas did not remain true to their own Orthodox background, but it is to suggest that they introduced elements of the Eastern Orthodox tradition within a specific context and in a specific way. The line of reasoning was already there in the form of the 'De Regnon thesis' that we mentioned in Chapter 2. This thesis states that there is a divide between Western theology, which suffers from an emphasis on the one essence of God and essentialist thinking in general, and Eastern Orthodox theology, which is characterized by an emphasis on the relationality of God as Trinity. As such, therefore, the climate for a positive appreciation of Eastern Orthodox theology was already present in Western theology. Eastern Orthodoxy matched with a feeling of discontent about the general shape of Western theism and linked up with a post-Hegelian interest in communion and relationality and was presented as the theology that had these desirable notions at the centre of its thought.

Thus, we can say that Eastern Orthodox theology as a theology of communion, as a theology centred around the notion of person and relation, is an Eastern theology that is possibly shaped after Western categories. The idea of deification is taken up into Western theology, but it receives a specific Westernized shape, be it only because it is taken up into Western liturgical and sacramental thought. Something of the inculturation of the Eastern Orthodox theology of deification in the Western context becomes visible in the debate

[11] Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* (London: Clarke, 1957).

between Lossky and Zizioulas about the so-called nature/energies distinction[12] to which we will later return. Zizioulas seems to be more strongly influenced by Western post-Hegelian relational thinking, reading this thinking back into the fathers, whereas Lossky has a strong interest in differentiating between Christian theology and modern forms of Platonism.[13] The latter has to do with his criticism of the sophiology of Bulgakov and Soloviev. These discussions also make it clear that neither Eastern Orthodoxy nor Western theology are monolithic blocks wherein everyone holds the same views.

There is more to deification than the influence of Eastern Orthodoxy on Western theology, though. There are factors that are intrinsic to the Western theological context that motivate it. A crucial factor seems to be a desire to overcome what Radical Orthodoxy has labelled the 'nihilism' that has characterized Western thinking and society since the Enlightenment. God as the bad infinite, as the other who is opposite to the world, has to be rejected. Different from Moltmann and others, but in fact already Barth before him,[14] in which the rejection of God as the wholly other has primarily the effect of humanizing God, it seems that at the beginning of the twenty-first century, people have a desire for a more elevated and absolute concept of God, which leads to the divinization of humans rather than to the humanization of God. Both movements, the humanization of God and the divinization of humans, however, are very close to one another, as we have seen in Chapter 2, where we saw that it is precisely Joseph Ratzinger who affirmed that ultimately, in Christ, God and human beings become one and the same.

Another factor is related, but still to be distinguished: the relationship between theology and spirituality. This relationship is explicitly thematized in Anna Williams' work on deification.[15] According to Williams, theology should learn from the tradition that theology is not a speculative detached enterprise, but firmly embedded in the spiritual movement of the soul into the divine. Thus, Aquinas' theology, which is often seen as speculative, should rather be seen as profoundly spiritual and soteriological. Along with this interest in the relationship between theology and spirituality goes the renewed interest in the history of Christian mysticism. Now, there is a major

[12] Aristotle Papanikolaou, 'Divine Energies or Divine Personhood: Vladimir Lossky and John Zizioulas on Conceiving the Transcendent and Immanent God', *Modern Theology* 19:3 (2003), 357–357.

[13] Vladimir Lossky, *Orthodox Theology: An Introduction* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1978), 27–35.

[14] Cf. Karl Barth, *The Humanity of God* (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1960).

[15] A. N. Williams, 'Mystical Theology Redux: The Pattern of Aquinas' *Summa Theologiae*', *Modern Theology* 13:1 (1997), 53–74, and her more recent monograph.

interest in mystics such as Meister Eckhart,[16] who in the past were often ignored for their 'heretical' views.[17]

In Protestant-evangelical circles, another factor could play a role, namely, an interest in a more sacramental mediation of grace through prayer, liturgy and sacrament rather than merely the spoken word. This goes along with a typically evangelical spirituality of God's experienced presence in the soul which is also strongly Christocentric in character. This spirituality has its roots in older strands of Protestantism, in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century pietism and romanticism, for example.

Together with the ecumenical interest that was at the basis of the Finnish reading of Luther, these are probably the main underlying reasons for the resurgent interest in deification within contemporary Western theology. During the 1990s, there was an initial enthusiasm about discovering the theme in all sorts of theologians where it was not commonly expected, such as Luther and Calvin. Along with this initial enthusiasm went a certain degree of vagueness as to what the concept of deification means and what it means in the theologians in which it has been traced. This is now the reason for a more nuanced approach in which it is increasingly asked what the concept might mean in different contexts. It is no longer simply a question of whether a certain thinker 'has the concept' but what that thinker means by it.[18]

6.7.1. What Does 'Deification' Mean?

The question of what is meant by the concept of deification turns out to be rather complicated. All sorts of things can be understood by it. This is due to the fact that deification as the ultimate destination and qualification of human beings plays the role of an umbrella term that encompasses the whole of soteriology or even theology. As an umbrella term, its meaning is in fact determined by all aspects of the theology of the thinker who uses the term or the concept. What is meant by deification is, therefore, in fact, only properly understood when put in the context of the whole of a thinker's theology and, therefore, means different things in different thinkers.

[16] See, for example, Oliver Davies, *Meister Eckhart: Mystical Theologian* (London: SPCK, 1991); Oliver Davies, *A Theology of Compassion: Metaphysics of Difference and the Renewal of Tradition* (London: SCM, 2001).

[17] Obviously, Denys Turner's work fits also well into this trend, which we discussed in Chapter 1.

[18] For discussion of the issue of definition, see Rakestraw, 'Becoming Like God', 260–264; Olson, 'Deification in Contemporary Theology', 193–194; J. Todd Billings, *Calvin, Participation, and the Gift: The Activity of Believers in Union with Christ* (Changing Paradigms in Historical and Systematic Theology; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 14–16, who speaks about 'participation' and 'union with Christ' rather than 'deification' when it comes to John Calvin; Donald Fairbairn, 'Patristic Soteriology: Three Trajectories', *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 50:2 (2007), 293–294; Gavrilyuk, 'The Retrieval of Deification', 651–652.

To give an example: deification is about 'becoming God', as the term's literal meaning has it. What that means, depends on one's concept of God. If 'God' means 'not the world' within a certain theology, then deification might mean: becoming that which you are not, a change of one's nature. But it could also mean, in a more metaphorical and 'weak' sense: enter into full communion with God while retaining the distinction between God and the world or human beings. This is how Bruce McCormack interprets Barth's use of elevation language, for example. It could also be true of Calvin and many other theologies. And even when Eastern Orthodox theologians claim that we become God in a real sense, then Lossky, for example, keeps a strong distinction between our participation in the 'energies' that flow from God, and the nature of God. The reverse is also true: if the relationship between God and world is one of ontological participation, then human beings have always had their existence in some way or another *in* God and, depending on other aspects of such theologies, this might mean that deification is not literally about a becoming, but more of an awareness on the part of humans that indeed they exist in God. For example, this seems to be the case in certain mystics and modern advocates of an ontology of participation, such as Radical Orthodoxy.

The same goes for other dogmatic *loci*. One's concept of deification will vary depending on one's Christology, anthropology and other *loci*. One can imagine an enormous variety of ways in which deification can be meant. Apart from these systematic-theological considerations, the concept of deification is not just a concept, but also a practice. It is intimately connected to rituals, prayers and liturgical practice, but more so in some theologies than in others. In Eastern Orthodox theology, this is strongly the case, while in others, it is not.

If, on the basis of our analysis, we take the enormous variation of ways of conceptualizing deification into account, it becomes very hard to develop a definition of deification that makes sense as a heuristic tool for interpreting the deification concepts of certain thinkers. What one might do instead is designate certain boundary markers that distinguish certain types of deification language from others. Thus, these boundary markers describe certain switches that trigger different theologies and their implications for the concept of deification.

One such boundary marker might be the distinction between an ontological or a soteriological type of deification. Many modern and, on the basis of what we have said in Chapter 1, post-Hegelian deification theologies seem to be of the ontological type. In these theologies, the world exists *in* God, and our destination is to become aware of this and to live in accordance with this fact. However, in such theologies, deification is *de facto* not an aim, but a fact of our existence. Soteriologically, an ontological theology of deification goes hand in hand with universalism. If our existence in God is a fact of our ontological set-up, no one can escape it, whether one is aware

of it or not. As far as I can see, this is the case in Radical Orthodoxy, and previous chapters contain sufficient discussion of Milbank and Ward to justify this claim. I would think that it is also true of Pannenberg given that his account of the Trinitarian God is strongly aligned to his account of God as the Infinite, which he conceptualizes as the Whole. Salvation in Pannenberg is a way of living up to what one is by nature, that is, accepting one's creatureliness and finitude as a creature of God. Thus, for Pannenberg, realizing that one is taken up into God coincides with the awareness and acceptance of the fact that one is taken up into God as a creature, and one will never be equal to the infinite creator, while still being a finite part of it.

In a merely soteriological type of deification, we do not automatically have our existence in God. Ontologically, these theologies are characterized by a stronger emphasis on the difference between God and the world. In these theologies, deification can happen as a result of salvation. Within this type, one can then distinguish again between deification theologies in which this 'becoming divine' happens as a 'surprise' of salvation, and those in which this deification is the completion of our inborn capacity. This depends, among other things, on one's view of the relationship between nature and grace. The first seems to be the case in Reformed theologies, whereas the latter seems more common in Roman Catholic theologies.

In fact, however, the distinction between an ontological or a soteriological account of deification is still far too rough and not nuanced enough to do justice to the many ways in which the relationship between God, the world, salvation and deification hang together. Vladimir Lossky's work is a good illustration of this. Central to Lossky's work is the distinction between the essence of God and the energies.[19] The notion of divine energies is the key to Lossky's understanding of the concept of deification. The origins of the distinction between God's essence and energies are traced back to twelfth-century theologian Gregory Palamas.[20] Lossky recognizes that the Greek fathers have not always worked with the distinction between the essence of God and the energies, but maintains that something like this has always been recognized. The primary purpose of the distinction is to deny that deification is about 'becoming God' in the sense of sharing in the divine essence. Thus, the nature/energies distinction functions as a guarantee for maintaining the difference between the creator and creatures. As the activity of the Trinity in creation, the energies are to be distinguished from the internal relations of the Trinitarian persons, and, therefore, they also need to be distinguished from the procession of the Son and the Spirit from the Father. At the same time, Lossky maintains that the energies of the Trinity are fully divine, and thus, that through the believers' participation in the divine energies they become in full and real communion with the Trinity.

[19] Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, 67–90.
[20] Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, 69–71.

Lossky's account of the divine energies shows that the distinction between ontology and soteriology is useful, but that it needs to be used in a nuanced way, because it receives its meaning in the context of a specific doctrine of God and the Trinity. In terms of this boundary marker, deification in Eastern Orthodoxy is clearly within the realm of soteriological deification. In Lossky's work, this goes along with an explicit rejection of a Platonic metaphysics and an emphasis on the distinction between God and the world.[21] In this respect, it is interesting to see that Lossky develops the nature/energies distinction precisely in order to retain a strong distinction between God and the world on the one hand, and the nature of God and the energies of God on the other. Deification, according to Lossky, is something different from receiving a share in the essence of the Trinity, while Lossky still upholds that it is a real participation in the energies of the Trinity through the Holy Spirit, but still this participation in the energies of the Trinity is something that is distinct from mere creaturely existence.

Lossky's stress on the notion of the energies reflects something of the logic that we developed in Chapter 2, when dealing with Augustine's emphasis on the difference between what we now call the 'immanent' and the 'economic' Trinity. As I argued there, Augustine's stress on the full equality of the persons of the Trinity, rejecting every type of functionalization of the persons in their relationship to the world, led him to the strong difference between the immanent and economic Trinity. Interestingly, we see that Lossky rejects the functionalization of the internal relationships between the persons of the Trinity as well, and in Lossky this is likewise intended to reject a parallel between a Neoplatonic metaphysics and a Christian account of the relationship between God and the world, along with a strong interest in apophaticism. This is not to deny the many differences between Augustine and Lossky, but it is merely to note a shared interest between a typically Western (even more in my 'Calvinizing' reading) Trinitarian theology and a typical representative of Eastern Orthodoxy.

A second crucial boundary marker has its place in Christology. Here, of course, the famous sayings of Irenaeus of Lyon and Athanasius come to mind, which both say that Christ became (Son of) man to make us (Son of) God.[22] Whether there is a connection between Christology and deification is already a crucial boundary marker, but mostly such a connection is being made. A more interesting boundary marker can be found in the specific way in which Christology is linked to deification. Then, the question is how the divine and human natures in Christ are related, and what that means for

[21] Lossky, *Orthodox Theology: An Introduction*, 27–35; Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, 23–43. Especially in the latter book, Lossky's critique of Plotinus comes close to my analysis in Chapter 1.

[22] Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses*, for example, 3.10.2 and 6.1.1; Athanasius, *De Incarnatione*, 54.3.

the way in which believers share in Christ's human and divine nature. A huge variety of configurations, dependent on the specific context in which the theology in question has its place, is possible. For example, it seems that most 'deification'-theologies from the Reformed tradition have little interest in a general theology of deification. Deification takes the form of *communio cum Christo*. This notion of *communio cum Christo* is very widespread in the Reformed tradition, not only in Calvin but also in many others, such as Reformed scholastics from the continent and Puritans from the Anglo-Saxon world. Mostly, as Mosser has rightly shown in his article on Calvin, this communion with Christ is mediated by the Spirit.[23] There is a clear parallel here between Calvin's doctrine of the sacraments and his notion of communion with God. For Calvin and probably for the majority of the Reformed tradition, this implies that believers do not become 'one with Christ' in any Christological sense, which means they do not become ontologically one with Christ, but Christ is present in the believers through the Spirit and believers are transformed into the image of God in Christ through the Spirit.[24] This seems less so (presupposing a different view of *communicatio idiomatum* as well as a different sacramentology) in the recent Finnish Lutheran turn towards *theosis*, where it is primarily emphasized that the participation of the believer in Christ is not just a forensic relationship to something external, but a real 'presence' of Christ in the believer.[25]

In many contemporary deification theologies, from both East and West, Ratzinger and Zizioulas, for example, the Christological dimension of deification is strongly linked to the sacramental dimension of baptism and the eucharist. In Ratzinger and Zizioulas,[26] this moves them automatically into the soteriological type of deification, because deification is mediated by the eucharist and in the eucharist, by the Church. In the eucharist, we grow into the divine–human communion that is the body of Christ and it is only in this divine–human reality that we reach our true human destination. For both Ratzinger and Zizioulas, it seems that this Christological account of deification implies that we receive a share, in Christ, in the very nature of the second person of the Trinity, without the

[23] Carl Mosser, 'The Greatest Possible Blessing: Calvin and Deification', *Scottish Journal of Theology* 55:1 (2002), 49. See also Todd Billings' monograph, which takes the role of the Spirit into account, especially in chapter 3, but with the specific agenda of refuting recent criticism of Calvin by those associating themselves with Radical Orthodoxy: Billings, *Calvin, Participation, and the Gift*, chapter 3.

[24] Mosser, 'The Greatest Possible Blessing', 55.

[25] Mannermaa, 'Theosis as a Subject of Finnish Luther Research', 37–47.

[26] For Ratzinger, see 2.8 and for Zizioulas, see Papanikolaou, 'Divine Energies or Divine Personhood', 363–371, who draws primarily on Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church*.

nature/energy distinction that we found in Lossky.[27] Both Ratzinger and Zizioulas accept some form of relational ontology that implies a turn away from a strong substance-ontological distinction between God and the world rejecting the possibility of speaking of God or the world as something that exists of its own.

A third and final boundary marker can be seen in soteriology, the doctrine of grace. Different configurations of the boundary markers introduced above lead to different types of soteriologies. A crucial boundary marker for the doctrine of grace is the difference between a strongly ontological deification language, and one that remains at the soteriological side of the spectrum. A strongly ontological form of participation of all that is in God turns Christianity and the Church into a mere illustration of an ontological fact that is the case even when we do not live up to it. In terms of the doctrine of grace, it does away with any form of synergism, although such soteriologies might have a synergistic strand to the extent that it is up to the believer to live in accordance with the nature of reality.

In soteriological forms of deification theology, deification might either be completely the result of grace, without any role for human works, or some sort of synergism may be involved. It is interesting to see that an interest in deification has been traced at both sides of the spectrum. In Eastern Orthodox theology, going back to strands in the Greek fathers, there is a subtle interplay between divine grace and human works. On the one hand, it is through grace that we receive a share in the divine nature because the energies *are* grace, and even when the energy-language is rejected it is through means of grace, particularly the eucharist, that we receive a share in the divine nature of Christ. Still, the way we participate in grace is in accordance with the human will, and to those from the Western tradition this may sometimes sound as synergistic.

In the Western tradition itself, it is interesting to see that those theologies that are self-consciously synergistic, such as the Wesleyan or Methodist tradition, generally develop strong forms of deification, and so do certain evangelical and pentecostal communities. On the other hand, Lutheran and Calvinist traditions have never given up entirely on the idea of union with God, although that union is mostly more *communion* than union, and often not of an ontological nature, and entirely attributed to divine grace without any merit on the side of believers. In an article in the *Lutheran Quarterly*, Anna Briskina rightly notices the differences between the Finnish school of Lutheranism and the Eastern Orthodox theosis language.[28] Even when Luther teaches deification, this notion of deification is embedded in a completely different soteriological and liturgical framework than the Eastern Orthodox concept and practice of deification.

[27] Papanikolaou, 'Divine Energies or Divine Personhood', 357–357.
[28] Briskina, 'An Orthodox View of Finnish Luther Research', 24, and 29–32.

6.7.2. Augustine and Deification

What happens if we look at Augustine's theology in *De Trinitate* from the perspective of the concept of deification? Such a question triggers what we have said in the previous sections. The question of deification in Augustine should be dealt with in terms of his theology as a whole, because it is in connection with other theological *loci* that the concept of deification gets its specific meaning. The boundary markers defined above hint at certain key aspects of these connections. An additional advantage is that here, at the end of the book, the coherence of Augustine's Trinitarian theology enters the scene again in a final approach to it from the perspective of deification.

If we look at deification in Augustine from the perspective of the first boundary marker, Augustine is clearly in the soteriological camp. Bonner, whose article on deification in Augustine still provides a valuable overview of Augustine's view of deification, agrees with this.[29] At the same time, Bonner follows something of an ambiguity in Augustine, combining his statement that there is no deification by nature in Augustine, with Augustine's statements about the existence of ideas in *Diversis Quaestionibus Octoginta Tribus* 46.2, where Augustine says that everything that exists, exists by participation (*participatione*) in the eternal ideas which are in the mind of God. Thus, Bonner's identification of deification language and philosophical participation language would turn Augustine again into an ontological deificationist.[30]

In this chapter, we have seen a similar ambiguity as we find in Bonner, namely, the use of participation language in book 14 on the one hand, but then strictly reserved for the eschatological state of moral perfection, in which we will be like Christ, and a creational notion of existing 'in God', God 'not being far from all of us', for 'in Him do we live and move'. Book 14 had both strands of thought, but the idea of participation was not used for the creational notion of existing 'in God', but only for the eschatological state of moral perfection.

In addition, in Chapter 4, I have already dealt with the way in which the eternal ideas play a role in Augustine's theology, and that as far as I can see, they no longer function like the Platonic ideas. If they had done so, there would have been an obvious route from the world into the Divine and Augustine explicitly denies this. Additional evidence for this can be found in his view of the Trinity in books 5–7, where he introduces a much stronger form of negative theology than is possible in Platonism. In Augustine, the relationship between God and the world cannot be described in rational terms, which is indeed what an ontology of participation aims to do.

Hence, if so, Augustine's deification language is soteriological rather than ontological. This leads us to the second boundary marker, that of Christology.

[29] Bonner, 'Augustine's Conception of Deification', 374.
[30] Bonner, 'Augustine's Conception of Deification', 372–373.

Bonner strongly insists on the Christological character of deification in Augustine.[31] Most of the Christological issues that Bonner deals with, I have dealt with in Chapter 3, when discussing existing research in Augustine's Christology. As I have argued there, I do not think that the idea of deification is as central to Augustine's Christology as certain scholars suggest. This is also true of Bonner's analysis, partly due to the fact that he collects 'deification quotes' from everywhere in Augustine's work, which takes them out of their context within these works. As we have seen in Chapter 3, there is deification language in books 4 and 13, but this deification language is embedded in a soteriological context that focuses very much on 'becoming just' rather than 'becoming God'.

In books 14 and 15 of *De Trinitate*, we have found clear hints towards the Christological boundary marker: the question of whether believers receive a share in Christ's human or also in his divine nature. It turned out that a share in Christ's divine nature is explicitly denied by Augustine. In Augustine, deification is explicitly not the participation in the divine essence.[32] Bonner rightly emphasizes the adoption language that Augustine uses when he speaks about the destination of believers.[33] They become children of God, but through participation in Christ's human nature and not in parallel with Christ's Sonship. The thesis from book 14, that we do not participate in Christ's divine nature, is of course in formal contradiction with Augustine's use of the Athanasian formula. This is all the more reason why one should be nuanced about the significance of Augustine's use of this formula.

The third boundary marker, concerning the role of grace in deification, can, of course, be quickly decided for the *doctor gratiae*. We do not become divine or just by virtue of our own merit, but due to the grace of God given to us through the Spirit. At the end of his article, Bonner rightly notes that in spite of the fashionable occurrence of deification language in Augustine, this should not close our eyes to the fact that his deification language is firmly embedded in his doctrine of grace and predestination.[34] Although Augustine is very clear that we need to grow in virtue and justice, and that the ultimate destiny of human beings is to be restored into the original image of God, he does not suggest believers 'work' for that in the sense of something that is at their disposal to achieve in their own power. For Augustine, growth in virtue and justice is a matter of growth in Christ, in an increasing humility on our part and an increasing nearness to God, an intimacy with

[31] Bonner, 'Augustine's Conception of Deification', 372–380.

[32] The fact that deification does not mean receiving a share in the divine essence is often readily accepted by advocates of deification, but I am by no means sure that this is always the case, especially in modern forms of deificationism. I would not know, for example, how the relational theologies of Ratzinger and Pannenberg could avoid affirming that we receive a share in the very core of what it means to be divine.

[33] Bonner, 'Augustine's Conception of Deification', 378.

[34] Bonner, 'Augustine's Conception of Deification', 385.

God that keeps us away from desire and the temptations of this world. In this respect, although Augustine lays great emphasis on doing the good, purification as a condition for the vision of God, his theology of grace still precludes him from becoming a moralist. Nor is Augustine tempted to bind our moral and spiritual improvement to rituals, prayer or liturgical practice as such. Of course these may play a role in our moral improvement, but they do not do so in an *ex opere operato* sense. As we have seen in the second half of *De Trinitate*, Augustine showed the complexities of our moral and spiritual disposition. Its restoration is, therefore, likewise a complex process. It takes its starting-point in our relationship with God, but involves also the renewal of our relationship to ourselves and to other human beings.

Apart from the boundary markers discussed so far, we see in books 12–15 of *De Trinitate* a deep interest in the restoration of our true humanity rather than in the transformation of our humanity into something that it is not by nature.[35] In this human nature, there has been and should be perfected a similarity, although, as I have argued, of a very specific kind, between God and a human being, but this image of God in humans is not intended to suggest that human beings become divine, but rather that they receive a share in eternal life, living before the face of God forever. Thus, the difference and distance between God and human beings is retained, even in the eschaton. The vision of God is not the same as becoming God. One might even suggest that a deification as a sharing in the divine nature would do away with the relationality between God and human beings that Augustine construed as the foundation of what human beings are. It is precisely the intention to be God without keeping the distance that constitutes Augustine's understanding of sin.

6.7.3. Final Remarks

The question of whether or not Augustine teaches deification is of course not the most interesting question. More interesting is the question of what Augustine's theology has to offer at the level of soteriology and how that compares with an ontology of participation. Having reached this point in this book, we have a last opportunity to weave together the different threads which have been drawn in this book, so that we may reflect on the distinct contribution of Augustine's thinking to the systematic-theological landscape.

What is this contribution? Why does Augustine's Trinitarian theology offer an appealing alternative to contemporary Trinitarian theologies and metaphysics of participation? These theologies offer us mostly a soteriology of deification in which we exist in God or will be taken up into God. Augustine's theology offers an important alternative to these because in his theology, the irreducible otherness as well as nearness of the Trinity who is God come so beautifully to expression. The Trinity who God is is inalienably 'someone'

[35] Cf. Bonner, 'Augustine's Conception of Deification', 377.

for us; a mystery that brings us the highest happiness in our relationship with it, a happiness that lasts forever, that makes our hearts burn without getting exhausted, that gives us rest without getting bored, that makes us do the good without longing for the bad by way of variation. The Trinity lives in us through the Spirit, and we abide in it. But God forever remains the other, at the same time. Our salvation consists in *communion* with God, not in becoming God.

Communion, while retaining the distinction between the Trinity who God is and us, leaves us a true 'space' to live a truly human life. For being able to respect the otherness of the other in the relationship, we as human beings, both in the direction of God and in the direction of other human beings, need a certain realm of our own, where we can find the locus of our own freedom. An egoism that would turn our relationship to God and fellow humans into a competitive relationship, trying to manipulate the other, becomes superfluous because in our relationship with the Most High, we receive our own proper place, under God, a place that is still proper for our human condition. The remaining difference between Creator and creature guarantees this distinct realm for a true humanity.

It is worthwhile to briefly reflect on the reconfiguration of the transcendentals that we have found in Augustine. This will enable us to get into focus the systematic potential his theology offers to us. As I have repeatedly shown in this book, Augustine rejects the convertibility of the transcendentals. For him, truth is not the same as being and goodness is not the same as truth. This was most evident in book 8, where Augustine broke off the route towards the Trinity as truth and pursued the line of goodness as a basis for our return to God. Justice was the key towards the vision of God, who alone is the Truth, the Truth that only the pure of heart can see.

The theological potential of this aspect of Augustine's theology is in the emphasis on doing the good over knowing the truth. Theologies that locate our salvation on the level of ontology, in terms of what we are, will put all the emphasis on our knowledge of our true state. Paralleling Augustine's portrayal of the Platonists, these type of theologies suffer from an intellectualist twist. In Augustine's theology, doing the good takes priority over knowing the truth, although, as I have argued above, his doctrine of grace precludes his theology of becoming moralistic.

In its focus on justice and doing the good over against having cognitive access to theological truth, Augustine's theology has an anti-ideological potential, especially if it is combined with Augustine's key insight that all have access to the good. The common good is not a given. Justice is something that is not in our own power because if it is in our own power and it hurts others, it cannot be justice. Justice can only be that which is trustworthy for all. Knowledge is power, but justice cannot be so because, if it is power that hurts others, it cannot be justice. Thus, if goodness takes priority over truth, then Christian theology does not have its persuasive potential in

a claim of ultimate access to the truth about God and salvation, supported with absolute grounds. It has its persuasive potential in the holiness of believers, as the famous quote from Tertullian has it: 'See, how they love one another.'[36]

Remarkably enough, Augustine's rejection of the convertibility of the transcendentals results in a new approach to matter. The Western Christian way of dealing with the material and the body has been strongly criticized in the theology of the twentieth century, due to a turn from transcendence to immanence. God was humanized in order that we might be divinized. Nevertheless, I would like to make a plea for Augustine's approach to the value of the created order because it follows from his view of the relationship between God and the world. We and our material reality are not the highest good. This radically relativizes the value of the created order, perhaps more than we would like in our culture. However, in the light of the ecological crisis the world faces at the moment, it might be a very worthwhile view. Due to the rejection of an ontological deification, the world and those who live in it get a distinct theological value. There is a duality between God and the world that is still not a dualism because both poles of the duality have a positive value, although not at equal rank. There is unity in the justice that is done in heaven and on earth, but without implying an ontological monism, because the unity of the heart between God and human beings does not undo the duality that characterizes the relationship, as Revelation has it:

> Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.' (Rev. 21.1-4, NIV)

[36] Tertullian, *Apologeticum*, 39.7.

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